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Law - A country mouse - 1904

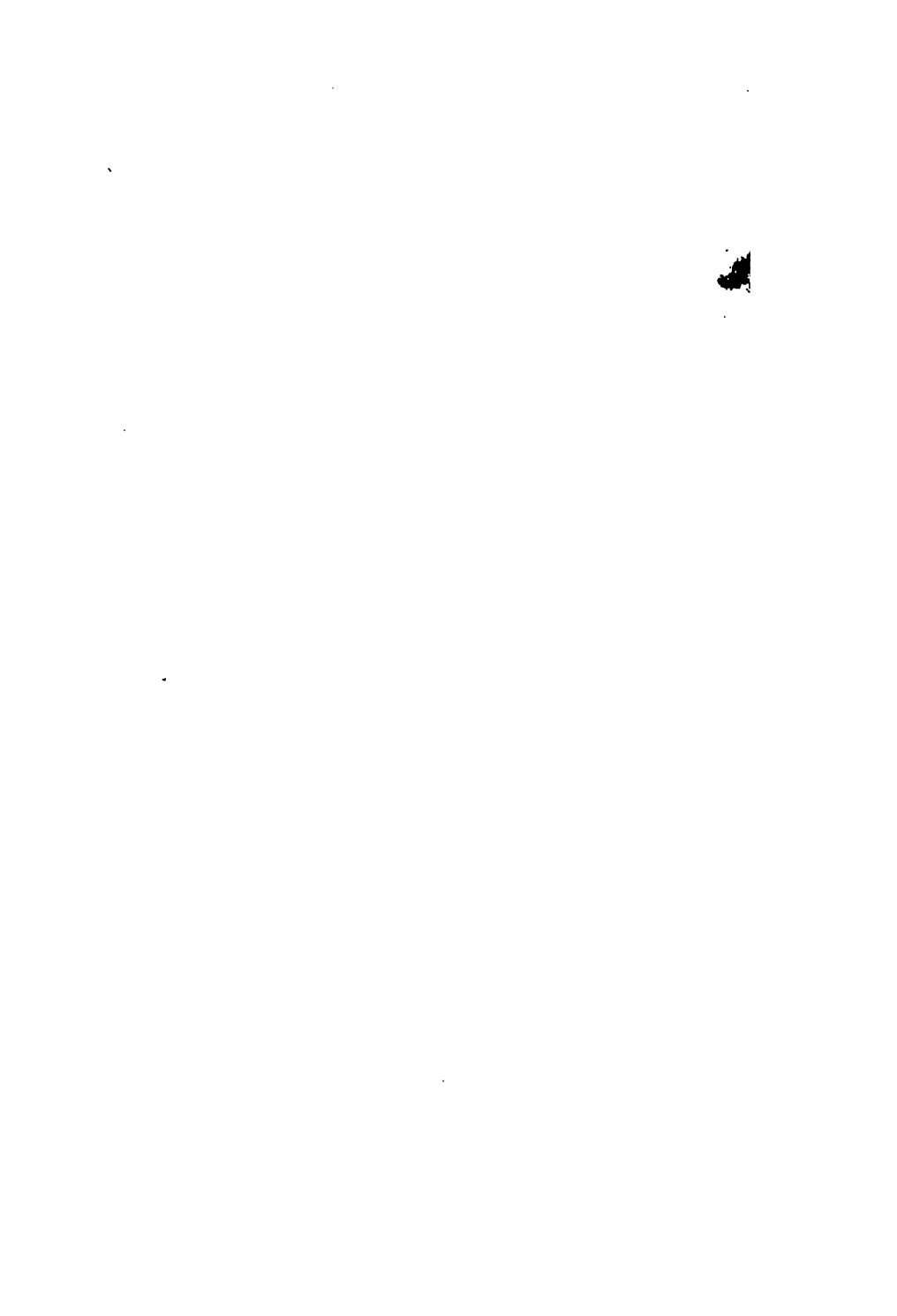


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THE GIFT OF
ROBERT GOULD SHAW
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A Country Mouse

BY

ARTHUR LAW



SAMUEL FRENCH, 28-30 West 38th St., New York



A COUNTRY MOUSE,

A SATIRICAL COMEDY

IN THREE ACTS

BY

ARTHUR LAW.

AUTHOR OF

*"Hope," "Mr. Guffin's Elopement," "The Happy Return,"
"Uncle Samuel," "A Mint of Money," "Chirruper's For-
tune," "Gladys," "John Smith," "All Abroad," "Dick
Venables," "The Judge," "Culprits," "In Three Vol-
umes," "The Magic Opal," "The New Boy," "The Great
Tay-Kin," "The Ladies' Idol," "The Showman's Sweet-
heart," "The Sea Flower," etc., etc.*

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GIFT OF
ROBERT GOULD SHAW
APR 28 1926

A COUNTRY MOUSE.

*Produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre,
February 27th, 1902.*

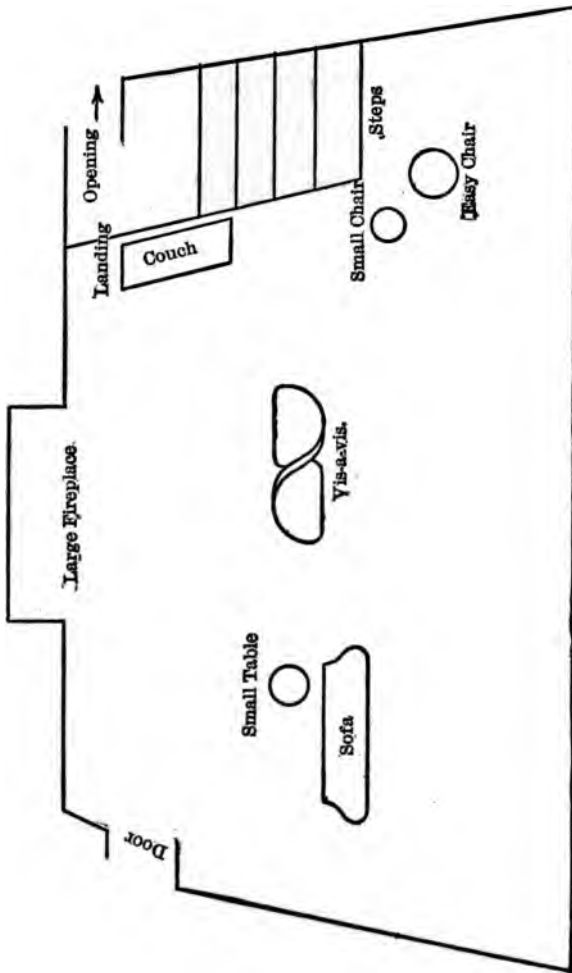
CHARACTERS:

The Duke of St. Kitts (<i>aged 65</i>)	MR. C. W. SOMERSET
Lord Robert Wyckham (<i>aged 30</i>)	MR. AUBREY FITZGERALD
John Bowlby, M.P. (<i>aged 36</i>)	MR. J. D. BEVERIDGE
The Hon. Archibald Vyse (<i>aged 28</i>)	MR. GERALD DU MAURIER
Jephcot (<i>a butler, aged 60</i>)	MR. FREDERICK VOLPÉ
Footman (<i>aged 25</i>)	MR. H. TEMPLETON
Lady Sylvia Bowlby (<i>aged 26</i>)	MISS GRANVILLE
Violet Aynsley (<i>aged 24</i>)	MISS VANE FEATHERSTON
Angela Muir (<i>aged 18</i>)	MISS ANNIE HUGHES
Mrs. Cropper (<i>aged 50</i>)	MRS. E. H. BROOKE

ACT I.

A HANDSOMELY FURNISHED DRAWING-ROOM.

The furniture shown in the plans is only what is required for the stage business.)



A COUNTRY MOUSE.

ACT I.

TIME.—Evening.

SCENE.—Drawing room in LADY SYLVIA BOWLEY'S house in Park-lane.

LADY SYLVIA and VIOLET AYNLEY discovered. LADY SYLVIA is seated on "vis-a-vis" seat up L.C., taking coffee cup from JEPHCOT, who stands R. of her with coffee service. VIOLET is seated on chair down L., with coffee cup in her hand, lighting cigarette which FOOTMAN, who stands L. of her, is handing her. ANGELA MUIR is heard playing a dreamy air on the piano in the inner room.

LADY S. I think you'll find those cigarettes rather good.

VIOLET. A new kind?

LADY S. I fancy they are. (the FOOTMAN hands cigarette to LADY SYLVIA; she takes one and lights it)

VIOLET. (puffing out smoke) Awfully nice and not too strong.

LADY S. Do you inhale?

VIOLET. Bob is trying to teach me, but I don't get on very fast. He says it's well worth learning.

LADY S. (smoking) Humph! Yes, they're not half bad, are they? (exit FOOTMAN R. followed by JEPHCOT).

VIOLET. A.I. Where did you get them?

LADY S. He sent me the box this morning.

VIOLET. Your husband?

LADY S. No.

VIOLET. One of the others?

LADY S. The other.

VIOLET. Which is that?

LADY S. Archie.

VIOLET. Mr. Vyse?

LADY S. Yes.

VIOLET. Oh! Is he still——

LADY S. Still! He always was—he always is—he always will be.

VIOLET. How nice! Does your husband know?

LADY S. I've not the least idea.

VIOLET. I suppose he would kick up a shine.

LADY S. I hope he knows his place better than that. My dear child! John Bowlby, of Bowlby, Hooper and Co.'s Entire! A man whose name is in gilt letters over half the public houses in England! You don't imagine for one moment he would presume to question my right to do as I please?

VIOLET. He takes marriage easily?

LADY S. He takes it as he finds it.

VIOLET. But those kind of people—you'll forgive me, dear, won't you? Those kind of people so often have old-fashioned ideas as to the sanctity of the marriage tie.

LADY S. He may have the prejudices of his class, I daresay. I've no wish to deprive him of them; but he can't expect them to affect me in any way. (*the piano stops*)

VIOLET. Well, I'm glad you're so happily married; and I'm curious to see Mr. Bowlby.

LADY S. Haven't you met my husband?

VIOLET. Never.

LADY S. Oh, he's here sometimes. Indeed, I asked him to dine to-night, but he said he would be detained in the House. They've got a debate on beer connected with glucose or arsenic or something, and I believe they expect him to speak.

VIOLET. Is he a great speaker?

LADY S. Yes; in the House of Commons. Not in mine. But, really, he's a very good fellow, and I've nothing to complain of. He doesn't care a bit how much money I spend. I've never been out of debt since I married him.

VIOLET. What a dear man! I was in Cairo, you know, when you married. Where did you pick him up?

LADY S. In Monte Carlo. My father had lost a pot of money at the tables. He was playing on a system by which he was bound to win in the long run. Unluckily he couldn't run long enough, and on this particular night he was stoney broke. John happened to be staying at our hotel, and my father made himself very agreeable and borrowed a few thousands from him, only to lose them all the next day. John was, of course, too delighted to be of use to a Duke, and never expected to be repaid, but my dear old dad is absurdly punctilious in these matters, so, having no money, he paid him in kind.

VIOLET. In kind?

LADY S. Yes. He introduced him to me.

VIOLET. And now you are married and settled.

LADY S. Unsettled, darling. Of late, terribly unsettled.

VIOLET. Our friend Archie?

'A COUNTRY MOUSE.

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LADY S. Yes. He's tired of playing the rôle of the tame cat on the hearthrug, and he wants me to run away with him.

VIOLET. My dear girl!

LADY S. Of course I wouldn't tell *everyone*.

VIOLET. I suppose not.

LADY S. But I can trust you.

VIOLET. (*rises, crosses in front of LADY S., and puts coffee cup on table R.C.*) It won't do, Sylvia. It's not good enough.

LADY S. I'd have married him long ago, but he had no money.

VIOLET. And what has he now? (*leaning over back of sofa R.C.*)

LADY S. Less than ever, poor man.

VIOLET. Then how in the world——?

LADY S. My husband settled two hundred thousand on me. And I'm credibly informed that—in these cases—marriage settlements are not disturbed.

VIOLET. Humph! (*coming down R. end of sofa*) Mr. Bowlby is reputed to have something like fifty thousand a year—isn't he?

LADY S. About that.

VIOLET. And two hundred thousand means—let me see—about *eight* thousand a year. That's rather a drop, isn't it?

LADY S. I believe in love in a cottage. (*rises and puts coffee cup on table R.C.*)

VIOLET. And a dinner of herbs? (*sits on sofa*) Or no dinner at all; but tea and boiled eggs? My sweet, romantic friend, believe me, when boiled eggs come in at the door love flies out at the window.

LADY S. You're horribly mercenary. (*stands L. end of sofa*) It is simply this. Have I the right to destroy Archie's life? Am I justified in letting him go about the world with a haunted look in his eyes and a breaking heart?

VIOLET. What about Mr. Bowlby's heart?

LADY S. That could be easily riveted. I would see that my father arranged with the Prime Minister to make him a baronet.

VIOLET. Look here, Sylvia—do you really mean this?

LADY S. I don't know. I'm thinking.

VIOLET. Take my tip, and go on thinking.

LADY S. Ah, you don't know what love is. (*goes slowly to L.C.*)

VIOLET. Oh, don't I? Ha, ha, don't I? What do you suppose I sent you that note for to-day, asking you to call me *Mrs. Aynsley* before these people here to-night?

LADY S. (*going to sofa, R.C.*) Well—really—I didn't know. And I've no idea now.

VIOLET. Because I'm in love with Bob.

LADY S. Lord Robert Wyckham? (*sits on sofa beside VIOLET*)

VIOLET. Yes.

LADY S. What's that to do with it?

VIOLET. Everything. Don't you know that he's one of those men who are never attracted by an unmarried woman?

LADY S. And you have let him believe—?

VIOLET. I'm married? Precisely. (*showing wedding ring on her finger*) Look. There is the magic circle which holds him fast. It came about quite by accident. The first time I met him my father was with me; and, somehow or other, Bob got it into his head that my venerable dad was my husband. I thought it was rather fun and didn't undeceive him. Then—with very little preamble, for he doesn't lose time—he assured me he had an insuperable objection to spinsters. He spoke very nicely about it, and said there was no real catch in a straight flat course, and that the only true sport was an obstacle race.

LADY S. He's sure to find you out.

VIOLET. Not if I'm careful. Of course he wanted to call on me, but I said no, once for all—and he thinks it's because I don't want him to meet my husband. (*the piano begins*)

LADY S. And you've really lost your heart?

VIOLET. Every scrap of it.

LADY S. Do you meet him?

VIOLET. Constantly! And he sends me such lovely letters.

LADY S. Letters! That's giving you a hold over him!

VIOLET. Oh, he never signs them, and they're always typewritten. You won't catch Bob asleep.

LADY S. I doubt if you'll catch him at all. To use the Boer vernacular, Lord Bob is remarkably slim.

VIOLET. Quite so. At the same time I am not unproficient in guerrilla tactics myself.

LADY S. Well, I wish you luck, dearest.

VIOLET. Thanks, darling.

LADY S. (*listening*) How charmingly your cousin plays. (*rises and goes slowly L.*)

VIOLET. (*lies back and puts her feet upon sofa*) Doesn't she? I'm awfully fond of Angela. She's so amusingly unsophisticated. Such a dear little country mouse.

LADY S. Is she staying with you long?

VIOLET. No, she goes home in a few days. She lives with her aunt, you know, in a sweet little cottage near

A COUNTRY MOUSE.

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Dorking; all honeysuckle and roses and creepers and things.

LADY S. How delightful! I feel sometimes I could be quite happy in leading a peaceful, idyllic existence. (*sits on chair down L.*)

VIOLET. I know that feeling. It comes at the end of the season, and lasts about three weeks. (*murmur of voices outside*) Ah, here are the men. They've not hurried themselves, I must say.

LADY S. No, they've taken their time. (*pointing at VIOLET's feet*) Vil Vi, dear! (*the piano stops*).

VIOLET. What?

LADY S. You're showing a good deal of stocking.

VIOLET. Yes, but I'm not supposed to know it.

Enter the DUKE OF ST. KITTS, MR. VYSE and LORD ROBERT WYCKHAM R.; they are all laughing heartily.

DUKE. Yes. And all this time she was in the window behind the curtains. (*laughs and goes L.C. up stage*)

VYSE. (*up stage c.*) No! No! (*laughs*)

DUKE. She was. They found one of her shoes there, (*laughs*)

LORD R. (*up stage R.C., laughs*) You ought to send it to "The Pink 'un." (*laughs*)

LADY S. Well, you all seem very merry.

VIOLET. What's the joke?

VYSE. Oh—nothing. Only one of the Duke's stories.

VIOLET. Oh, do let us hear it.

LADY S. No, certainly not. (*rises*)

LORD R. (*going to back of sofa R.C.*) I've been telling the Duke he ought to write his reminiscences.

LADY S. I hope he'll do nothing of the kind. (*goes up c.*)

VIOLET. I wish he would. I'm so fond of reading the lives of great men.

VYSE. The book would sell like wild-fire. (*joins LADY SYLVIA BOWLEY up c.*)

DUKE. If I could find a publisher.

VYSE. Oh, you'd find a publisher fast enough. The question is whether the libraries would take it.

LORD R. I tell you what. Write it in French. French covers a multitude of—obstacles. (*comes to L. end of sofa R.C.*)

DUKE. That's a deuced good notion. (*sits on couch up L.*)

VIOLET. (*to the DUKE*) Don't forget to send me a copy. (*to LORD ROBERT WYCKHAM who is standing beside her, looking at her feet on the couch*) Do you want to sit down?

LORD R. Oh, pray, don't move.

VIOLET. I thought you were looking for a seat.

LORD R. My eyes are where my heart is—at your feet!

VIOLET. (*quickly putting her feet down*) How very pretty!

LORD R. They are. (*sits beside her*) Do you know, I was half afraid your husband might be here to-night.

VIOLET. Oh, no. I never bring my husband with me. Besides, of course, to-night, I——

LORD R. Expected me.

VIOLET. (*coolly*) Did I? I forget.

LORD R. No, you don't. You knew perfectly well I was coming.

VIOLET. How could I know?

LORD R. You had my note this morning.

VIOLET. I get so many notes.

LORD R. Why, you told me no one wrote to you but I!

VIOLET. What a lot of stories I tell; don't I?

DUKE. (*to LADY SYLVIA*) What's become of Miss Muir?
(*the piano begins*)

LADY S. She's in the next room.

VYSE. All alone? The poor child will think we're deserting her. (*going L.*) I'll go and——

DUKE. No. (*rises and stops VYSE*) You stop and talk to Sylvia. You sat next Miss Muir at dinner. (*chuckling*) You've had *your* innings. Now it's *my* turn. (*exit L.U.E.*)

VIOLET. (*aside to LORD ROBERT*) I fancy our friend Archie is going to catch it (*rises and goes up stage with LORD ROBERT; they stand by fireplace*)

LADY S. (*to VYSE*) I thought we were never going to get a word together to-night.

VYSE. (*looking after the DUKE*) I hope he's not going to talk the usual rot to her.

LADY S. You stayed so long in the dining-room.

VYSE. One comfort is—she won't understand him.

LADY S. (*slightly annoyed*) Yes—well—never mind.
(*the piano stops suddenly in the middle of a bar*)

VYSE. She's so simple and childlike, so absolutely in-artificial.

LADY S. (*sarcastically*) Quite refreshing; isn't it?

VYSE. I never met such wonderful innocence. 'Pon my soul, she—she frightens me.

LADY S. I don't think you have any real grounds for alarm.

VYSE. (*turning to her*) I wonder what she thinks of us?

LADY S. Perhaps she'll confide her impressions to my father. You may trust him to draw her out.

VYSE. He's—he's——

LADY S. A wicked old man. Quite so. We're a very wicked family. Ever since we came over with the Conqueror, we've enjoyed the distinction of being exceptionally

bad. (*slight pause*) Archie, I've been almost — shall I say — dreading this evening?

VYSE. You mean —

LADY S. I promised I would give you my answer to-night.

VYSE. (*confused*) Yes — yes.

LADY S. It's an awful step for a woman to take. (*goes slowly to R.*)

VYSE. Yes. (*follows her*)

LADY S. Every ha'penny gutter rag will have its own particular staring headline.

VYSE. Yes.

LADY S. And the sixpenny weeklies will have us on toast.

VYSE. Yes.

LORD ROBERT and VIOLET sit on couch up L.

LADY S. Then there's another thing.

VYSE. Yes?

LADY S. (*at sofa R.C.*) When poor dear Marion Stembridge left her husband he revenged himself in the most ungentlemanly manner by declining to sue for a divorce, in spite of her writing him a charming letter assuring him she would not defend the case.

VYSE. Beast!

LADY S. Yes.

VYSE. Do you think Bowlby might behave badly too?

LADY S. I don't know. (*sits on sofa R.C.*)

VYSE. I say, look here, you know. (*sits beside her on sofa*) I've no right to let you risk it.

LADY S. But if I am willing —

VYSE. That doesn't excuse *me*. To allow you to run such a — Oh, it would be infernally dishonorable.

LADY S. But my dear Archie —

VYSE. I *must* think of my honour.

LADY S. I'd no idea you were so imaginative.

VYSE. If I didn't care for you so much —

LADY S. Now please don't quote those stupid old lines — "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more." When Tennyson wrote —

VYSE. Lovelace, Lovelace.

LADY S. Well — whoever it was — he didn't know what he was talking about. Archie, this — this question is not for you to decide. It must rest with me.

Enter the DUKE and ANGELA MUIR L.U.E.

DUKE. You've not seen it! Bless my soul, you don't say so! Have you been to "The Jollity" Theatre?



■ COUNTRY MOUSE.

ANGELA. No.

DUKE. Oh, you must go. It's a ripping play. "The Flyaway Girl." Capital music, pretty faces, and the best show of leg—feet in London.

ANGELA. Really!

DUKE. But perhaps you don't care for the theatres?

ANGELA. I do, very much. But you see I live in the country. (VIOLET and LORD ROBERT rise)

DUKE. And you bring the fragrance with you. (to the others) Miss Muir is so delightfully pastoral. So breezy, and grassy—and—buttercuppy!

ANGELA. But we are not at all out of the world, you know. (sits on vis-a-vis C.)

VIOLET (to LORD ROBERT) Miss Muir lives in Surrey. (sits in chair down L.; LORD ROBERT comes down a little R.C.)

ANGELA. And we are only a mile from Dorking, which is quite a nice town, where they frequently have entertainments in the Town Hall.

DUKE. Is that so?

ANGELA. Oh yes. Last month we had a conjurer; and not long before that a panorama of Jerusalem. And in our own little village we are very gay sometimes. There's the annual concert after the harvest thanksgiving; and on Christmas Eve we have a lecture from the Vicar with a magic lantern.

LADY S. How exciting!

ANGELA. It is—very. We all sit in a dark room, you know; and every now and then somebody screams. I don't know why, but they do.

VIOLET. Hysteria, I suppose.

DUKE. Pinching, I imagine.

VYSE rises and goes C. as if to sit beside ANGELA, but is anticipated by the DUKE who quickly crosses behind her and sits R. of her on vis-a-vis. VYSE turns up stage, annoyed, and then comes down L. and stands R. of VIOLET. LORD ROBERT sits beside LADY SYLVIA on sofa R.C.

ANGELA. Next Tuesday we are to have the school-children's treat, when we shall run races and play games.

DUKE. Kiss in the ring?

ANGELA. Oh, do you know it?

DUKE. I've not played it for some time.

ANGELA. I could soon teach you the rules.

DUKE. No, could you? Will you ask me down? Will you?

ANGELA. Oh, we should be too pleased. I'm sure my aunt would be delighted.

DUKE (*aside to ANGELA*) We'll talk of this again.

LADY S. Violet, did Miss Muir say she was going home on Tuesday?

VIOLET. Yes, her time is rather short, so we are doing all we can in the meanwhile.

ANGELA. We are going to the Zoological Gardens to-morrow. Aren't we, Violet?

VIOLET. (*to ANGELA*) No. On Thursday, dear.

ANGELA. There's so much to see, and London is such a large place. There seems to be no end to it.

DUKE. There's only one—the West End.

ANGELA. Really? But it's all so full of interest. I can't fancy anything more delightful than to be able to spend one's days at Westminster Abbey, and the Tower, or the British Museum. (*to the DUKE*) I suppose you often go to the British Museum.

DUKE. Frequently. (*aside to her*) I'll meet you there on Friday, if you like.

ANGELA. Oh, but are you sure it won't inconvenience you?

DUKE. Not at all. I've nothing on. If I had, I'd put it off.

VIOLET (*rising*) Now then, Sylvia, what are we going to do?

LADY S. Anything you please. (*rises*) What would you like to do? (*LORD ROBERT rises*)

VIOLET. Suppose we play "bridge."

LORD R. That's the game!

DUKE. (*rises; to ANGELA*) Do you play it?

ANGELA. No. (*rises*)

DUKE. (*to the others*) She doesn't know it.

ANGELA. But you mustn't mind me. (*turns up stage with VYSE, who whispers to her*)

LADY S. Yes, yes. (*to the others*) What do you say to roulette?

DUKE. Ah, roulette! Come along, Mrs. Aynsley. (*goes up stage with VIOLET and off L.U.E.*)

LORD R. (*crossing L. with LADY SYLVIA*) Oh, is it in there?

LADY S. Yes. (*goes up stage with LORD ROBERT*)

ANGELA *secretly slips her fan behind a cushion on the sofa* R.

LORD R. (*to LADY SYLVIA*) I met your husband to-day.

LADY S. Indeed. I've not seen him for a long time. How was he looking?

LORD R. Very fit, I thought. (*exit L.U.E.*)

LADY S. (*at top of steps*) Are you coming, Miss Muir?

VYSE. (*looking about him up c.*) Miss Muir has dropped her fan somewhere.

ANGELA. (R.C.) Please don't wait, Lady Sylvia. (*looking about her*).

LADY SYLVIA looks at ANGELA and VYSE and goes off.
L.U.E.

VYSE. (*going to ANGELA*) At last! (*down c.*)

ANGELA. Why did you ask me to pretend to lose my fan? (*takes fan from behind cushion*)

VYSE. You don't know?

ANGELA. I've been trying to guess.

VYSE. And can't you?

ANGELA. I thought you must have some good reason, but—no, it quite puzzles me.

VYSE. I wanted an excuse for staying behind with you.

ANGELA. (*as if puzzled*) Oh. Oh, you wanted—oh—I'm afraid you must think me very dull and stupid. I'm a little slow at taking things in—but, you see, I live in the country.

VYSE. I never met anyone like you before.

ANGELA. That's what the Duke said. He said I wasn't like anyone else, and that he would back me for a monkey against the field. I don't know what he meant, but I thought it was very nice of him. (*goes slowly to sofa R.C. and sits, VYSE looks toward L.U.E., and seeing the coast is clear, goes to her*) But you want to play—what did they call it—roulette?

VYSE. No, I don't.

ANGELA. (*moving a little R. to make room for him on sofa*) You're sure I'm not keeping you.

VYSE. (*sitting beside her*) No. (*earnestly*) I wish I had met you before.

ANGELA. Thank you.

VYSE. Are you engaged?

ANGELA. Not just at present.

VYSE. What! Then you *have* been?

ANGELA. Yes, a good deal.

VYSE. Oh! I thought—I hoped—

ANGELA. I don't think I quite—

VYSE. I asked you if you were engaged to be married?

ANGELA. Oh! (*laughing*) Oh, good gracious, no! I'm far too young to be married.

VYSE. And far too good—for anyone.

ANGELA. Can one be too good to marry?

VYSE. You would be *awfully* good to marry.

ANGELA. But I think married people are always good. I'm sure those I've met in London have been extremely

good, particularly the husbands, who have all said they would do anything for me.

VYSE. Do you know what you are? A wild flower. A little river-side forget-me-not, that has strayed by mistake into the stifling, torpid atmosphere of a forcing-house.

ANGELA. Meaning London?

VYSE. Yes. The men here — these men who say all kinds of things to you and don't mean the half of them. Take my advice, and don't trust a single man you meet.

ANGELA. (*assuming astonishment*) Not one?

VYSE. No.

ANGELA. Except you.

VYSE. Except me, of course.

ANGELA. I'm quite sure you are very different from the others.

VYSE. I hope so. You attracted me from the first. When I took you down to dinner, the touch of your hand on my arm sent a thrill up to my shoulder. Your subtle influence began to stir me with the soup. When we reached the *entrée* I felt a distaste for everything else, and I couldn't look at the sweets — it would have been mockery, with you beside me.

ANGELA. (*very shyly*) And I was enjoying my dinner all the time — little knowing.

VYSE. But you know now. Angela, you have completely transformed me.

ANGELA. I'm very glad.

VYSE. I feel a better man when I'm with you. (*leans back a little*)

ANGELA. (*dropping her eyes and moving slightly nearer him*) Then you ought to be with me as much as possible, oughtn't you?

VYSE. That's what I was thinking. What — what are your engagements?

ANGELA. Well — on Thursday I'm going with Violet to the Zoological Gardens, and on Friday the Duke of St. Kitts has promised to take me to the British Museum.

VYSE. No, no! (*rises*) You mustn't go.

ANGELA. (*surprised*) Why?

VYSE. It would be shocking.

ANGELA. The British Museum? I thought it was quite a proper place.

VYSE. It isn't the place — (*goes c.*) it's the Duke. (*turns up c.*)

ANGELA. (*wonderingly*) Oh. He seems very nice.

VYSE. Yes, but he isn't. (*comes down and leans over*)

back of sofa a little R. of her) You're so ingenuous. You don't understand these things.

ANGELA. Of course, I'm only a simple girl. I've had very little experience. You see, I live in the country. *(she looks up at him, and he bends his head as if to kiss her, at which she drops her eyes and withdraws slightly to L.; pause)*

VYSE. Yes — well — it's not the correct thing for a girl to meet a man alone.

ANGELA. Really!

VYSE. No. *(comes round R. of sofa)* It's one of those things that society bars. So it's never done — openly. Well, now — *(sits R. of her on sofa)* have you anything on to-morrow? Do you ever ride in the mornings?

ANGELA. I've nothing to ride.

VYSE. Can't you ride one of your cousin's horses?

ANGELA. I'm a little afraid of strange animals. Now if I only had my dear old donkey with me —

VYSE. *(amused)* Good gracious! You couldn't ride a donkey in the Park!

ANGELA. Couldn't I? He's perfectly quiet, and wouldn't kick anyone. But — Violet and I very often play croquet in the mornings. Do you play croquet?

VYSE. Yes, rather.

ANGELA. I am sure Violet would be very pleased if you would come over to-morrow.

VYSE. Delighted.

ANGELA. It's really very good of you.

VYSE. Good of me! It's awfully good of you! I'm so sick of these women one meets every day with their brainless chatter and their soulless faces. They bore me to death with their inanity and vapidty. But you — ah, there's a restfulness and fragrance about you that make me feel like a Sunday afternoon in a hayfield.

LADY S. *(off stage)* All right. Play for me. I won't be a minute. *(VYSE and ANGELA rise on hearing her voice and VYSE snatches ANGELA's fan from her and slips it behind cushion; ANGELA goes up C.)*

VYSE. *(quickly)* I say, what time to-morrow?

ANGELA. About twelve.

VYSE. Twenty-seven, Rexham-gardens, isn't it?

ANGELA. Yes.

Enter LADY SYLVIA, L.U.E.

VYSE. *(pulling cushion away and disclosing fan)* By Jove! Here it is, I declare! *(holds up fan)*.

LADY S. *(with intention)* Oh, you've found the fan at last!

VYSE. Yes. Behind the cushion. *(gives fan to ANGELA)*.

ANGELA. Oh, thanks, so much.

LADY S. What a hunt you've had, haven't you?

VYSE. Yes; I thought we should never find it.

LADY S. So did I.

VYSE. (*aside*) Damn! (*turns up to fireplace*)

LADY S. (*down L.*) Well; roulette is in full swing and Miss Muir is losing all the fun.

Enter JOHN BOWLEY, R.

LADY S. John!

VYSE. Ah, Bowlby.

LADY S. Is the debate over?

BOWLBY. Yes. How are you, Vyse? (*to LADY SYLVIA*) Yes, it finished early, and there was no other business of importance, so I thought I'd come home for a change.

LADY S. (*to ANGELA*) This is my husband (*introducing them*) John—Miss Muir. (*VYSE comes down to LADY SYLVIA*)

BOWLBY. (*shaking hands*) How-de-do, Miss Muir? Sorry I couldn't accept my wife's invitation to dinner to-night, but I'm so tied to the House.

ANGELA. (*sympathetically*) Oh, haven't you been well?

BOWLBY. (*smiling*) I mean the House of Commons.

ANGELA. (*smiling*) Oh—how very stupid I am! (*BOWLBY and ANGELA go R. and stand talking apart*)

LADY S. (*going up L. with VYSE*) I've made up my mind, Archie. I've decided at last.

VYSE. I was sure you would see it in the true light.

LADY S. I've treated you badly.

VYSE. No, no. (*they stop at foot of steps*)

LADY S. But I feel I can't spoil your life—

VYSE. You mustn't mind me.

LADY S. And so—and so, dear, you shall take me away.

VYSE. (*aghast*) But, Sylvia—

There is a little laugh from BOWLBY and ANGELA.

LADY S. S-s-sh! Don't say anything more now. I'll send you a note to-morrow. (*goes quickly up steps and off L.U.E.* VYSE stands looking after her aghast, and then quickly follows her off L.U.E.)

BOWLBY. I never forget a face, and I know yours perfectly.

ANGELA. I don't see how, because I live in the country.

BOWLBY. And that's where I've seen you. You live in Dorking, don't you?

ANGELA. (*crossing L.*) Near Dorking.

BOWLBY. Well, I've met you in the town more than once. I go down there every now and then, because our brewery is there. You must have seen the place — Bowlby, Hooper, and Co.

ANGELA. Oh! Are you Bowlby, Hooper and Co.?

BOWLBY. Part of them.

ANGELA. Really! We always have your beer. Aunt Sarah has a four and a-half gallon cask in every three months.

BOWLBY. That's very good of her. I hope by a strict attention to business to ensure a continuance of her patronage. (*they laugh*) And how long have you known my wife, Miss Muir.

ANGELA. (*sits in chair L.*) I've not met her till this evening. I'm staying with my cousin, Violet Aynsley; and as she was coming to dinner here to-night Lady Sylvia very kindly asked her to bring me with her.

BOWLBY. What other men are here beside Mr. Vyse?

ANGELA. The Duke of St. Kitts — and — a Lord Robert Wyckham.

BOWLBY. A Lord Robert? *The* Lord Robert.

ANGELA. Oh! Is he a very famous man?

BOWLBY. Well — famous is not *quite* the word. But it's very near it. I think, Miss Muir, you don't know very much of London life, do you!

ANGELA. No, I'm very backward. But I'm gradually acquiring a good deal of information.

BOWLBY. Humph! It's a pity! I mean — you'll forgive me — won't you? But you impress me with being different from other young ladies, and, although I've no right to advise you, will you give me the privilege of —

ANGELA. (*rising*) I'm so sorry, but I'm engaged to-morrow, Thursday and Friday.

BOWLBY. (*puzzled*) I beg your pardon? I meant to say that if you'll take my advice you'll be content with your life in the country.

ANGELA. I think it's tremendously good of you to take so much interest in me.

BOWLBY. It is because you make me feel —

ANGELA. A better man?

BOWLBY. What? (*turns away to conceal a smile*)

ANGELA. Nothing. I interrupted you. (*sits on vis-a-vis*)

BOWLBY. You make me feel that you are still unsophisticated — unspoilt. Of course, there are heaps of nice people in London, but — well, there are different sets, and it would be a thousand pities if you were to fall into the wrong one.

ANGELA. That's why Violet was so anxious for me to meet Lady Sylvia. She said her set was better known than any other in town, and that if you once got into it you never got out of it.

BOWLBY. That is certainly true.

ANGELA. Then I'm sure I'm a very fortunate girl. I think Lady Sylvia is perfectly charming, don't you? But of course you do, because you're her husband.

BOWLBY. Yes — oh, yes! (*goes R.; ANGELA rises*)

Enter LADY SYLVIA, VYSE, VIOLET, the DUKE, and LORD ROBERT, L.U.E. LADY SYLVIA and VIOLET are wearing their opera cloaks, and VIOLET is carrying ANGELA'S.

VYSE. We shall be in lots of time for the last ballet. It isn't on till eleven.

LADY S. We shall be there in ten minutes. Miss Muir, we are all going to the "Empire" to see the new ballet. You'd like to come, wouldn't you? (*goes up stage with VYSE*)

ANGELA. I shall be delighted.

VIOLET. I said you would, dear. (*aside to DUKE*) Who is that?

DUKE. (*looking at BOWLBY*) That? It's only Bowlby! (*takes ANGELA'S cloak from VIOLET*)

VIOLET. Really.

DUKE. (*to BOWLBY*) Ah, John? Back from the House, John? Couldn't keep away any longer, eh? (*chuckles*)

Enter JEPHCOOT, the butler, R.U.E.

JEPHCOOT. The hansoms are at the door, my lady. (*exit R.U.E.*)

BOWLBY. Hansoms?

LADY S. Yes; we couldn't wait for the carriage. (*VYSE comes down to ANGELA*)

DUKE. So we're going two and two. (*goes quickly to ANGELA C., to intercept VYSE*) Miss Muir — I'll take care of Miss Muir. (*puts cloak round her shoulders as they go L. together*)

ANGELA. Oh, thank you so much. (*stands L. with the DUKE while he fastens her cloak for her*)

VYSE. (*at D.R. with LADY SYLVIA*) I say — you people. Whoever gets there first must wait in the foyer, or we shall miss each other.

LADY S. (*aside to VYSE*) That wouldn't be at all a bad idea — to miss each other. (*exit with VYSE D.R.*)

LORD R. (*going R. with VIOLET*) How-de-do, Bowlby? Good-night.

BOWLBY. (*mechanically*) Good-night. (*exit LORD ROBERT and VIOLET, D.R.*)

ANGELA. (*going, with her arm in the DUKE'S*) By-the-by, — are you fond of croquet? (*they stop C.*)

DUKE. Croquet? Why? What about croquet?

ANGELA. Nothing—only Violet and I frequently play it in the mornings about twelve o'clock.

DUKE. (*jumping at it*) Do you, by Jove?

ANGELA. Violet would be awfully pleased to see you. Our address is twenty-seven, Rexham Gardens. (*the DUKE chuckles as they go quickly to D.R.*)

DUKE. (*stopping at D.R.*) I say, you're not afraid of a hansom, are you?

ANGELA. Not in the least.

DUKE. If you are—sit tight and cling to me.

ANGELA. Thank you—I will. (*exit with DUKE, D.R.*)
BOWLBY goes slowly to L.)

Enter JEPHCOT, D.R.

JEPHCOT. Is there anything I can get you, sir?

BOWLBY. No, thanks, Jephcot, I shall be going to bed soon.

JEPHCOT. (*after a pause*) Mr. John—— (*BOWLBY turns*): I beg pardon—Sir.

BOWLBY. "Mr. John" takes me back, Jephcot.

JEPHCOT. It slips out sometimes, sir.

BOWLBY. Naturally! after—how long is it?

JEPHCOT. Thirty-two years, sir.

BOWLBY. Is it, by Jove!

JEPHCOT. Yes, sir. I lived seven and twenty with your father, and going on five with you. And that's what I was about to say. I'm not as young as I was, sir. I'm getting a bit old, and my joints are beginning to find me out.

BOWLBY. Look here, Jephcot, you're not going to give me notice?

JEPHCOT. I'm afraid I must, sir.

BOWLBY. I'm sorry to hear it.

JEPHCOT. And I'm sorry to do it.

BOWLBY. But—your age. Is it only that?

JEPHCOT. It's partly that, sir.

BOWLBY. Well?

JEPHCOT. You'll forgive me speaking plainly, sir?

BOWLBY. Of course. Go on. (*sits on chair L.*)

JEPHCOT. You see, Mr. John, I'm what you may call old-fashioned, in a manner of speaking. I'm used to old ways, and I can't drop into new ones, and—no fault of yours, sir, of course—but your marriage has altogether upset me.

BOWLBY. (*taking cigar case from pocket*) And so you want to give notice?

JEPHCOT. Yes, sir. (*goes to table R.C. for match-box*)

BOWLBY. (*to himself*) I wish I could (*to JEPHCOT*) I shall miss you; I shall miss you terribly. You're one of my

earliest recollections. Upon my soul, you know, you're one of the family, and it will be like losing a relation.

JEPHCOT. (*gives match-box to BOWLBY*) I shall feel the parting too, sir.

BOWLBY. Then why go? (*strikes match and lights his cigar*)

JEPHCOT. With all respect, Mr. John, I'm afraid for my references. The house ain't what it was since her ladyship came. You still says grace before meat, but we've dropped family prayers, and we play the piano and ping-pong on Sundays. I've endeavoured to live respectable all my life, and, with your permission, sir, I should like to make a respectable end.

BOWLBY. Don't you think you might put up with it a little longer? I've got to put up with a good deal altogether.

JEPHCOT. I know you have, sir.

BOWLBY. Somehow, I don't see many of my old friends now. And if you go I shall hardly have a creature to speak to. Come, Jephcot — a little longer; try it a little longer.

JEPHCOT. (*pause*) Very well, Mr. John. I will.

BOWLBY. Ah! That's right. (*takes cigar from case*) Take a cigar, Jephcot.

JEPHCOT. Oh, no, sir, excuse me.

BOWLBY. Nonsense, man. (*giving him cigar*) Take it. (*JEPHCOT takes cigar*) Why, Jephcot, it was you who caught me smoking my first cigar. Do you remember?

JEPHCOT. Like as if it was yesterday.

BOWLBY. And you told my father.

JEPHCOT. I did, sir.

BOWLBY. And he gave me a thrashing.

JEPHCOT. Ah, those were happy days, sir. (*BOWLBY reaches for chair behind him and places it B. of his own*)

BOWLBY. (*pointing to chair*) Sit down, Jephcot.

JEPHCOT. Really, Mr. John, I —

BOWLBY. Sit down.

JEPHCOT. You're very good, sir. (*sits B. of BOWLBY*)

BOWLBY. I shan't go to bed for half an hour, so we'll have a nice cozy chat over old friends and old times. (*taking up match-box*) You want a light. Oh, I used the last match.

JEPHCOT. (*about to rise*) I'll go and —

BOWLBY. No. Here you are. (*knocks off the ash of his cigar against the heel of his boot, and holds cigar towards JEPHCOT*) Take a light from mine.

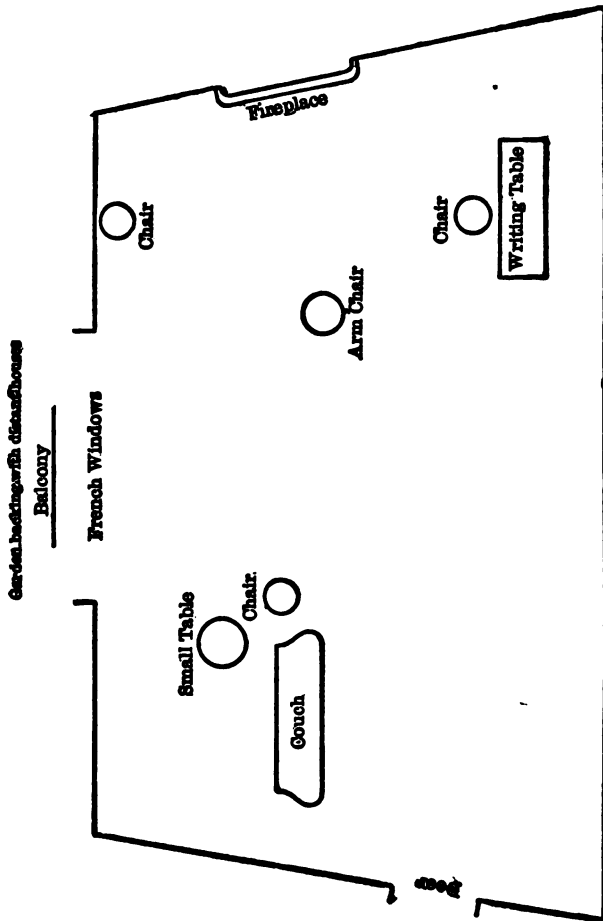
JEPHCOT lights his cigar at BOWLBY'S as the curtain slowly falls.

ACT DROP.

ACT II.

A PRETTILY FURNISHED MORNING ROOM.

Garden backing with distant houses.



ACT II.

TIME.—*The following morning.*

SCENE.—*Drawing-room at MR. AYNSLEY'S, Reaham-gardens, Kensington.*

VIOLET AYNSLEY *discovered seated at writing-table L., looking over typewritten letter.*

VIOLET. (*reading letter*) "And so I feel I can't go to bed till I have written you a line, darling; for I am wakeful to-night, and the click of the typewriter has a soothing effect and will send me to sleep, when I shall dream of you and of our future with its delightful uncertainty. Did I tell you I had a horrible nightmare the other night? I dreamt your husband was dead and that you were what the world calls free. Ah, dearest, that is not the sort of freedom you and I desire, is it? No, no. If you were, unhappily, single, the blossom of our love would indubitably perish; unless, indeed, I were to marry someone else. But there, I am becoming sentimental; so one more whisky and soda and then good-night." (*she folds letter*) Dear old Bob! What romantic ideas he has about marriage. I wonder if I am the *only* recipient of these—fervid epistles? If that typewriting machine of his could speak—Hem! Yes—there might be a good deal of amusement combined with considerable instruction in the love letters of a typewriter.

ANGELA MUIR *appears on the balcony C. from L.; she is carrying a croquet mallet.*

ANGELA. Nobody put in an appearance yet?

VIOLET. No, not yet. (*busies herself folding notes, addressing envelopes, etc., all through the following dialogue*)

ANGELA. (*coming down stage*) I wish they'd come. I'm tired of knocking the balls about by myself, and I'm in great form this morning.

VIOLET. (*smiling*) It strikes me you were in great form last night.

ANGELA. Last night?

VIOLET. You amused the Duke awfully.

ANGELA. (*wonderingly*) Did I?

VIOLET. And Mr. Vyse, too.

ANGELA. Fancy! I'm sure they were wonderfully good-natured. They both offered to drive me home in a hansom, and they got quite animated about it. Oh, they were so merry, and made such fun of each other. Mr. Vyse said "Goat!" and the Duke said "Lamb!" At least, it sounded like lamb.

VIOLET. (*smiling*) You dear pet! Well, Mr. Vyse won, didn't he?

ANGELA. Won?

VIOLET. It was he who drove you home.

ANGELA. Yes. We had rather an eventful drive. The horse was a little fresh; and Mr. Vyse said the cabman was, too. I was rather nervous at times, but he held me quite firmly and said if it came to the worst we would die in each other's arms.

VIOLET. How romantic! One last fond embrace!

ANGELA. No—that was on the doorstep. (*goes a little to R.*)

VIOLET. What!

ANGELA. (*turning*) It was quite accidental on *my* part. He said "Oh, look at the moon!" And I looked up—and he kissed me.

VIOLET. (*laughing*) Oh! Oh! Angela!

ANGELA. I told him, dear—(*going to VIOLET*) I told him I only kissed my *relations* in the country, but he said it was quite usual in London where people were more friendly.

VIOLET. You're a dear, sweet little goose. I wonder if you are able to take care of yourself?

ANGELA. (*going R.*) There's no necessity while everyone looks after me as they do.

VIOLET. Do you know that you're making someone *frightfully* jealous.

ANGELA. Jealous! (*puts mallet on couch R.C.*)

VIOLET. Yes.

ANGELA. Oh, Violet! Are you—are you in love with Mr. Vyse? (*sits on couch R.C.*)

VIOLET. (*laughing*) Oh dear, no!

ANGELA. Then whom do you mean?

VIOLET. Sylvia.

ANGELA. Lady Sylvia! But *she* couldn't be jealous of me!

VIOLET. Why not?

ANGELA. Because she's married.

VIOLET. Yes, but not to Mr. Vyse. (*rises and goes up L.C.*) Mr. Bowlby is a very nice man, and, I believe, an excellent brewer; but—well, it was not a love match on her side.

ANGELA. (*rising and going to her*) Then why did she——?

VIOLET. Marry him? (*sits in arm chair L.C., ANGELA sits on arm of the chair*) The Duke owed Mr. Bowlby money, and induced Sylvia to accept him as a settlement in full. You see, when a parent is in difficulties a daughter is very often a valuable asset. There were the Bassinghams, for instance. Poor Lord Charlie and his wife were in desperately low water, so what did they do? They went carefully through the commercial directory, made a selection of probable buyers, and disposed of their five girls to such advantage that they are now quite happy and comfortable.

ANGELA. This is all very new and strange.

VIOLET. Oh, people in our set have realised for some time that daughters are exceedingly profitable. So much so, that nowadays it's becoming quite fashionable to have large families of girls.

ANGELA. Well, this certainly opens up a promising vista to us poor things. The Duke was speaking to me last night about my future. (*rises*) He is very much interested in the future of young girls, and he asked me to come to him whenever I was in doubt or difficulty.

VIOLET. (*sarcastically*) That was very sweet of him.

ANGELA. Yes, wasn't it? (*goes up C.*) He said the employment of unmarried women was becoming a very grave question, and he seriously thought we should have to revert to the days of King Solomon. (*exit on balcony C. to L.*)

VIOLET. Humph! I'm beginning to entertain doubts, my dear young friend, as to the absolute genuineness of your beautiful simplicity.

Enter MANSEVANT D.R., followed by the DUKE OF ST. KITTS.

SERVANT. His Grace the Duke of St. Kitts. (*exit; VIOLET rises and meets the DUKE, C.*)

DUKE. Good morning! Good morning! Not late, am I?

VIOLET. (*shaking hands*) No, you're in capital time. Mr. Vyse hasn't arrived yet.

DUKE. Vyse! Is he coming?

VIOLET. Yes.

DUKE. I can't stand that man. Why did you ask him?

VIOLET. I didn't. It was my cousin — Angela. (*he utters an ejaculation of disgust*) You see, you do want two couples for a proper game, don't you? And I fancy she thought Mr. Vyse would be useful to pair off with me. (*she goes to writing table L., and stands while putting letter in envelope*)

DUKE. (*taken in by her*) Ah! Yes, yes! I see. Quite so. Miss Muir is such a sweet, ingenuous little thing; it would

be a thousand pities if she were to get into the wrong hands. And with so many unscrupulous men about. I don't want to run down my own sex—but look at Vyse.

VIOLET. (*with feigned apprehension, going to him*) You don't mean that *he* is —

DUKE. A bad lot. A very bad lot.

VIOLET. Dear, dear!

DUKE. No principle—no conscience where women are concerned. No, don't be afraid. I won't enlarge. Now, dear little Angela—I *must* call her Angela.

VIOLET. I'm sure she would like it. (*goes back to writing table*)

DUKE. She's just the kind of unsuspecting girl to be taken in by a specious rascal like Vyse.

VIOLET. I'm afraid she needs guiding.

DUKE. She does, begad!

VIOLET. What the poor child wants is the advice and counsel of some good, kind, motherly old soul who—(*goes to him*) you must talk to her.

DUKE. (*quickly*) What!

VIOLET. I mean as we have not got a nice old lady we must do the best we can with *you*.

DUKE. Oh!—ah!—yes. (*looking round room*) I say! Have any—any flowers come this morning?

VIOLET. Flowers? (*goes back to writing table, sits and addresses envelope*)

DUKE. Yes. I ordered some to be sent round from the florist's.

VIOLET. That's very nice of you. No; they've not come yet.

DUKE. I suppose she's fond of flowers?

VIOLET. She?

DUKE. Miss Muir.

VIOLET. Oh—oh—I thought you meant they were for me.

DUKE. You? Oh, no, no, (*chuckles*) certainly not. (*sits on couch R.C.*) I always play the game. I should never think of poaching on Wyckham's preserves.

VIOLET. (*with pretended coldness; rising*) Hadn't we better go and join Angela in the garden? (*goes up C.*)

DUKE. (*rises*) By all means. But, I say—you and Wyckham—ha, ha! Sylvia told me last night to call you Mrs. Aynsley before him; and I guessed why. Very clever, very smart! Ha, ha!

VIOLET. Can I trust you to say nothing? May I hope you will continue to—play the game?

DUKE. To be sure. (*they go up stage*) But I've seen for some time what was going on. Oh, I keep my eyes open.

Yes — and my ears too. (*chuckles*) I heard him last night at the Empire.

VIOLET. What did you hear?

DUKE. I and the others had just come out of the box, and you and Wyckham were left behind for a minute.

VIOLET. To put on my cloak.

DUKE. Quite so. (*chuckling*) And I then heard him distinctly.

VIOLET. Heard him?

DUKE. (*chuckling*) Oh — ha, ha! — I know that sound.

VIOLET. Sound?

DUKE. Yes.

VIOLET. (*with great dignity*) You are entirely mistaken. He was striking a match. (*exit on balcony c. to L. followed by the DUKE, chuckling and shaking his head*)

Enter SERVANT D.R., showing in VYSE. The SERVANT is carrying a basket of very beautiful flowers.

SERVANT. (*announcing VYSE*) Mr. Vyse — (*seeing the room is empty*) Oh! — the ladies are in the garden, sir.

VYSE. Are they alone? (L.C.)

SERVANT. No, sir. His Grace the Duke of St. Kitts is with them. (*puts basket of flowers on table R. and goes up stage*)

VYSE. Has he been here long?

SERVANT. Only a few minutes, sir.

VYSE. Did he — (*points to flowers*) bring those flowers with him?

SERVANT. No sir. They have just come from the florist's. They are for Miss Muir, sir. (*exit on balcony c. to L.*)

VYSE. (*going R.*) Humph! If it isn't St. Kitts, who the deuce can have sent them to her? She doesn't know anyone. At least — hardly anyone. (*puts his hat on table R.*) Oh, here's a card. (*looks at card tied to handle of basket*) Damn it! It is the old beast! Now, why the devil didn't I think of sending some?

Enter SERVANT, C.

SERVANT. Will you please to step into the garden, sir?

VYSE. (*musings*) Eh? What? Yes, all right; I'll come directly. You needn't wait.

SERVANT. Yes, sir. (*goes to D.R.*)

VYSE. Here — one moment. Does Miss Muir know these flowers have come?

SERVANT. Oh! Dear me, sir, I quite forgot to — (*turning to go back*)

VYSE. No, no! Never mind.

SERVANT. Sir?

VYSE. Don't trouble about it. I'll tell her.

SERVANT. Oh, thank you, sir. (*exit D.R.; Vyse takes a card from his card case, takes the DUKE's off the basket and substitutes his own*)

VYSE. There! (*crumpling up the DUKE's card and putting it in his trousers pocket*) Exchange is no robbery, and I'm sure mine looks very much prettier.

ANGELA. (*outside*) No, no! I won't let you fetch it. (*Vyse quickly picks up ANGELA's mallet from couch, and comes down R.*)

DUKE. (*outside*) Very well, then; we'll fetch it together.

Enter ANGELA and the DUKE, C. from L.

ANGELA. But I'm giving you so much trouble.

VYSE. (*turning and handing croquet mallet to ANGELA*) Is this what you are looking for? (*R.*)

ANGELA. Oh, Mr. Vyse. Thank you, yes. (*takes mallet*) We've been waiting for you to begin a game. (*R.C.*)

DUKE. (*to Vyse*) You're to be Miss Aynsley's partner. (*coming down L.C.*) She's far and away the best player, so we handicap her by giving her you.

ANGELA. (*to Duke*) But I'm sure you are a capital player yourself.

DUKE. (*pleased*) Well —

VYSE. He ought to be. He's had a lot of practice.

DUKE. Not lately.

VYSE. No, I mean all those years before I was born. (*goes down R.*)

THE DUKE glares at VYSE.

ANGELA. Oh! oh! what lovely flowers! (*goes to table R.*)

DUKE. Ah! Whom are *they* intended for, I wonder?

ANGELA. For Violet, I suppose.

VYSE. For Miss Muir, the servant said.

ANGELA. (*looking at flowers*) For me!

DUKE. (*chuckling to himself*) Sent by some admirer, I imagine.

VYSE. That goes without saying.

ANGELA. But who — who can it be? (*takes up basket*)

DUKE. Have you no idea? (*L.C.*)

VYSE. (*earnestly*) Can't you guess?

ANGELA. No. I (*putting her nose to the flowers and coming down C.*) Oh, how delicious! How perfectly exquisite! Who *could* have sent them? I *wish* I knew.

DUKE. Isn't there a—card somewhere? There's generally a card.

ANGELA. (*seeing card*) Oh—of course—yes. Here it is.

VYSE. And—whose is it?

DUKE. (*chuckling*) Show it him. Ha, ha! (*goes L.*) Show him the card. (*turns up stage, rubbing his hands and chuckling*)

ANGELA. (*to VYSE*) Yours! Oh, how very good of you!

DUKE. (*turning*) Not at all! Not at all!

ANGELA. Oh, but it is.

VYSE. Then it was a happy thought.

ANGELA. (*smelling flowers*) It's really awfully sweet of you. (*goes up c., looks off to L., and holds up basket*) Violet! Violet! Look, dear!

DUKE. (*goes to VYSE, R.*) I heard her say last night she was fond of flowers. And the first thing this morning, you see—the early bird, Vyse—the early bird! (*sits on couch R.C. and laughs*)

VYSE. You seem very fit this morning. (*sits R. of DUKE on couch R.C.*)

DUKE. I am. Never fitter. (*laughs immoderately*)

ANGELA. (*going to table R. with basket*) I must put you in water soon. Oh, you darlings! (*the men jump up quickly as if she meant them; the DUKE goes up c.*)

DUKE. (*aside*) A deuced lucky thought of mine, by Jove! Poor Vyse! Ha, ha! Poor Vyse! (*exit c. to L., chuckling to himself*)

ANGELA. I wonder I didn't notice your card at first.

VYSE. (*going up to R. of table*) I'm glad I thought of putting it there. Between ourselves—if it hadn't been for that, the Duke is quite capable of pretending that he sent them.

ANGELA. Oh, but not really!

VYSE. Ah, you don't know him. What is he doing here now at this unearthly hour?

ANGELA. Why, it's past twelve.

VYSE. And he never gets up before two.

ANGELA. Then he must be very fond of croquet to come so early to-day. (*puts a flower in his button-hole*)

VYSE. Ah! your wonderful simplicity and absolute ignorance of the world are so beautiful, that it makes me look back on my past life with positive hatred.

ANGELA. Are you what they call a person with a past?

VYSE. Why, what do you know of a person with a—

ANGELA. Nothing. Only I seem to have heard the phrase somewhere. (*they go c.*)

VYSE. If I had only known you five years ago I should have been another man.

ANGELA. But then I shouldn't have had the present satisfaction of feeling that I am helping you now. (*goes to arm-chair L.C.*)

VYSE. Helping me! Yes—to start afresh; to lead a new life.

ANGELA. Do you think you can manage it all by yourself? (*sits in arm-chair L.C.*)

VYSE. (*going to her*) No—with someone beside me. Since I've met you all my old friends are distasteful to me. I see their hollowness, the utter emptiness of their frivolous lives.

ANGELA. (*rises*) I may be frivolous, but I don't think I'm hollow. At least, I hope I'm not hollow. (*looks up at him*)

VYSE. You! My dear child, my— (*putting his arm round her and about to kiss her*)

ANGELA. No—please. We are not in a hansom now. (*crosses R., he catches her hand to detain her*)

VIOLET. (*outside*) Angela! Angela!

ANGELA. (*disengaging herself*) My cousin! (*calling*) Yes! I'm coming, Violet—coming! (*goes R. for her mail-bag*)

VYSE. Stop a minute.

ANGELA. No, no. We mustn't wait.

VYSE. One moment. What are you going to do this afternoon?

ANGELA. Nothing.

VYSE. Then suppose you let me give you some tea.

ANGELA. Where?

VYSE. There's rather a nice little tea-shop in Bond-street. It's number 505. You can't miss it. You'll see the name over the window, "The Old Cup and Saucer." It's really a new place. Shall we say half-past four?

ANGELA. That will suit me perfectly. Have you asked many people?

VYSE. N—n—no—not many.

ANGELA. How shall I come?

VYSE. (*takes his hat from table R.*) Drive down in a hansom, and I'll meet you at the door. By the way, your—cousin—you know—

ANGELA. Violet? (*up C.*)

VYSE. Yes. There's—there's no occasion to tell her where you're going.

ANGELA. Isn't there?

VYSE. No. You see, she might think I ought to have asked her too. And I—I shouldn't like to hurt her feelings.

ANGELA. Oh, no! Nor I. It's very considerate of you, and I won't say a word to her about it.

WYSE. You see the force of it, don't you?

ANGELA. Oh, quite! But I should never have thought of it myself. I think I shall always be learning something when I'm with you.

WYSE. You dear child!

Enter SERVANT, D.R.

SERVANT. Lord Robert Wyckham.

Enter WYCKHAM and exit SERVANT. WYCKHAM is restless and absent in manner.

ANGELA. (*surprised*) Oh! How d'you do, Lord Robert?

WYSE. Hullo, Bob!

LORD R. Good morning, Miss Muir. Ah, Wyse.

ANGELA. My cousin is in the garden. We are all going to play croquet.

LORD R. Will you tell her I'm here?

ANGELA. Won't you come?

LORD R. Thanks—no—if you wouldn't mind telling her.

VIOLET. (*outside*) Now then, you two! Do make haste.

ANGELA. Violet! Violet! (*exit C. to L., followed by*

WYSE) Lord Robert Wyckham's here. Will you come, dear?

LORD ROBERT *goes quickly up L., puts hat and stick on chair L. at back, and comes down L., pulling off his gloves. Enter VIOLET on balcony C.; she stands watching him for a moment, unobserved.*

VIOLET. Bob!

LORD R. (*seeing her*) 'Ah!

VIOLET. What's the matter?

LORD R. Matter? (*crosses R.*)

VIOLET. (*comes down a little C.*) You were walking up and down like a caged lion.

LORD R. I feel like one. (*crosses L.*)

VIOLET. You promised me you wouldn't come to the house.

LORD R. I can't help that. (*goes up L.*)

VIOLET. Fortunately Mr. Aynsley is not at home to-day.

(LORD ROBERT *turns*) Well! What has happened?

LORD R. (*comes down L.C.*) I've had an upset; a horrible frightful upset.

VIOLET. In a cab? (*R.C.*)

LORD R. No, in the club. I met a man there just now, and we were talking and—well—somehow or other he happened to mention Aynsley. And—(*close to her*) what do you think he said?

VIOLET. (*shaking her head*) I haven't a notion.

LORD R. (*intently*) He said that your husband is a widower!

VIOLET. Is your friend an Irishman?

LORD R. Yes. (*goes up c.*)

VIOLET. (*sits on couch R.C.*) I thought so. You see, while I'm alive it would be a little difficult for my husband to be a widower, wouldn't it?

LORD R. Violet! (*comes down to her*) Don't—pray don't trifle with me. My love for you has been the one great romance of my life. No other woman—I mean married, of course—has ever attracted me as you have. From the first moment I saw your husband—I loved you, for I perceived at a glance how impossible it was that such an ordinary specimen of conventional humanity could ever satisfy the heart hunger of a woman like you. And now—now—not half an hour ago—I met with the terrible, crushing intelligence that you are not married. Oh, Violet! Violet! you might have spared me this. (*goes to c.*)

VIOLET. Don't keep walking up and down like that.

LORD R. (*goes up c.*) You—you whom I thought so open, so candid, so altogether above deceit.

VIOLET. Do stop, for goodness sake!

LORD R. (*comes down R.C.*) Your ring—your wedding ring. (*points to her ring*) Was that only a trick to make me believe that you were free to love me? (*VIOLET quickly turns round a ring on her finger to look like a wedding ring*; LORD ROBERT goes L. and drops into chair at writing table) The one woman in all the world for me; and not married—not married! (*rests his elbows on table with his face in his hands*)

VIOLET. And you believe that? (*rises and goes towards him*)

LORD R. (*raising his head*) What can I believe?

VIOLET. Anything you hear; so it seems. (*turns up c.*)

LORD R. He distinctly told me that Aynsley was a widower.

VIOLET. (*turns sarcastically*) Indeed!

LORD R. Yes.

VIOLET. (*comes down R.C.*) And has it never come within the range of your experience that widowers occasionally marry again?

LORD R. (*rises quickly*) What? (*goes to her*)

VIOLET. (*with assumed coldness*) I am not in the habit of practising deception. (*crosses L.*)

LORD R. (*believing her*) Violet! (*follows and keeps pace with her; they both walk quickly*)

VIOLET. You, at least should have known me better. (*crosses R.*)

LORD R. (*repentant*) Violet!

VIOLET. I am surprised and wounded. (*crosses L.*)

LORD R. But, Violet, I —

VIOLET. I am deeply hurt, Lord Robert. (*crosses C.*)

LORD R. No, no! Bob — Bob — your own Bob!

VIOLET. (*with great dignity*) After this, it is extremely uncertain if I shall ever feel capable of Bobbing you again.

LORD R. What a silly ass I've been!

VIOLET. I'm glad the truth has come home to you at last.

LORD R. But look here, Violet —

VIOLET. *Miss Ayns* — (*quickly correcting herself*) Mrs. Aynsley, if you please. (*sits on R. of couch R.C.*)

LORD R. I wish to heaven I'd kicked that man down the club steps! (*goes to L. end of couch, pleadingly*) Will you listen to me? I'm sorry — awfully, frightfully sorry. It was the sudden shock of the thing. You've heard of a man being knocked silly by a blow? Well, that's what happened to me. I was completely knocked out, lost my senses for a time, and before I came to myself I came to *you*; and then I talked — well, you know what I talked — a lot of rot. Yes — I know it now — it was rot — every word of it; but you'll forget it. Yes — yes — forget all about it; and we'll be just the same as we were before; won't we — won't we?

VIOLET. I wonder — if you are really to be trusted?

LORD R. I haven't a doubt of it.

VIOLET. You are truly sorry?

LORD R. Horribly, sorry.

VIOLET. Humbly repentant?

LORD R. Grovellingly repentant.

VIOLET. And you'll be a good boy and never do it again?

LORD R. Never.

VIOLET. Then I think I'll give you another trial.

LORD R. (*in his ordinary tone*) Thanks. I knew you would. (*sits beside her on couch*)

VIOLET. (*laughing*) You wretch!

LORD R. You must admit it was a bit of a facer to be suddenly told there was no husband in the case.

VIOLET. Poor, dear man.

LORD R. Well — you say your husband is not at home, eh?

VIOLET. My husband is never at home.

LORD R. Never at home! And this is the man who expects to monopolise you! This is the husband who —

VIOLET. Don't you think we might leave my husband alone — for once? (*rises and goes round R. of couch and up a little*)

LORD R. Oh, if we could only leave him alone for always. Can't you see how dishonourable, how wrong it is to stay with a man you don't love?

VIOLET. (*as if considering the question*) When I can go away with a man I do. (*leans over back of couch*)

LORD R. Ah, what a dream it would be! What a perfectly exquisite dream. You and I together; far away from everything and everybody.

VIOLET. Living entirely for ourselves.

LORD R. Completely wrapped up in each other.

VIOLET. Thinking of no one else.

LORD R. Letting the world go hang.

VIOLET. Totally oblivious of other people.

LORD R. Not caring a dump for a soul.

VIOLET. Absolutely unselfish.

LORD R. Ah! it's a glorious world if we only make the best of it and think solely of our own happiness. If people lived more for themselves they wouldn't be so ready to interfere in their neighbour's concerns.

VIOLET. What a charming mind you have. You look at everything in such a beautiful light.

LORD R. (*takes her hand which rests on back of couch*) I see everything in the light of your eyes. (*rises*) Ah! my dearest — my own — (*about to embrace her*)

VIOLET. (*drawing back*) No, no!

LORD R. Why not?

VIOLET. (*glancing at windows*) Not now. (*goes up c.*)

LORD R. Well — look here, (*goes up L. for his hat and stick*) Come and have some tea this afternoon.

VIOLET. At the old place?

LORD R. No — I forgot to tell you. I've discovered a new tea-shop in Bond-street. It's only just opened, and they keep it dark.

VIOLET. Keep it dark? (R.C.)

LORD R. The room I mean. There's only a dim religious light; and I spotted one particular corner where your dearest enemy couldn't recognise you. 505 is the number. By the way — Vyse lives over the shop. He's got the flat above it. (*crosses R.*)

VIOLET. Supposing he saw us!

LORD R. Men never see one under these circumstances. You'll come?

VIOLET. You don't deserve it.

LORD R. No. That's all right. (*goes to D.R. and stops*) Half-past four?

VIOLET. If I come.

LORD R. Yes, quite so. Of course. Do you know — all the way home last night I thought of that embrace in the box. And when I took off my overcoat I kissed it on the shoulder.

VIOLET. Why?

LORD R. (*earnestly*) Because there was a little white patch there where your cheek had rested. (*exit D.R.*)

The DUKE and VYSE are heard in altercation outside.

DUKE. (*outside*) No, no. Oh dear, no!

VYSE. (*outside*) That was the game.

DUKE. (*outside*) Nothing of the sort!

VYSE. (*outside*) I say it was!

DUKE. (*outside*) You can say what you like!

The DUKE and VYSE appear on balcony with their croquet mallets; they are greatly excited.

VYSE. You should have left my ball alone, and gone for your hoop.

They enter from balcony.

DUKE. I say it wasn't the game.

VYSE. That's all you know about it.

DUKE. Look here. You can't teach me croquet.

VYSE. I know that.

ANGELA MUIR appears on balcony.

DUKE. I appeal to Miss Muir (*the three come down a few paces; VYSE R.C., ANGELA C., the DUKE L.C., VIOLET is down L.*) Now, Miss Muir (*pointing with his mallet to the floor*) my ball was here, and his was here, and the hoop was there, and I naturally — (*VYSE goes behind couch R.C., and leans against back of it with his back to the audience*)

ANGELA. I'm afraid I wasn't looking at the moment. (*goes R. and leans against back of couch R.C. and R. of VYSE*)

VYSE. Of course not. One gets tired of watching a man hovering over a simple stroke for ten minutes.

DUKE. (*incensed*) Simple stroke! (*to VIOLET*) Listen to him. I assure you he missed three absolutely *childish* shots. Simple stroke! Why, I'd give him points any day and play his head off. Simple stroke! (*aside to VIOLET*) I do think that man is the most conceited jackass I ever met. (*goes up L.C. with VIOLET*)

VYSE. (*aside to ANGELA*) Poor old St. Kitts. Queer old chap, isn't he?

ANGELA. Well — he's not quite my conception of a Duke. I mean he's not like those in the "Family Herald."

Enter LORD ROBERT D.R.; he goes C., and then up to VYSE.

LORD R. I say, Vyse, old chap.

VYSE. Yes?

LORD R. Shall you be at home this afternoon about half past four?

VYSE. (*quickly*) No — no, I shan't. I shall be out all day.

LORD R. Oh, never mind. (*aside*) That's all right. (*comes down L.C., and looks at VIOLET to attract her attention*)

VYSE. (*aside to ANGELA*) I shall be very much better engaged, shan't I?

ANGELA. But you mustn't throw over other people for me.

VIOLET comes down L. of LORD ROBERT; the DUKE goes up to windows C.

VYSE. I'd throw over the whole world for you.

ANGELA. You're the most unselfish person I ever met.

LORD R. (*aside to VIOLET*) I came back to ask Vyse if he would be in his rooms this afternoon. He says he'll be out all day. So if the tea-shop should be *very full* —

VIOLET. Oh — do you think I dare?

LORD R. I think so.

DUKE. Well, are we going to play any more, or what? Miss Muir, what do you say?

ANGELA. Delighted.

VIOLET. Come along then. (*goes up C. LORD ROBERT goes L.*)

Enter SERVANT, D.R.

SERVANT. Lady Sylvia Bowlby.

Enter LADY SYLVIA and exit SERVANT.

VIOLET. What? Sylvia! (C.)

LADY S. Good-morning, everyone. (*looks at VYSE and ANGELA; then crosses to VIOLET and shakes hands*) Quite an assemblage! What is it?

VIOLET. Croquet. Will you play?

LADY S. No, thanks. (*crosses L.*)

VIOLET. Well, come and look on. (*goes a little up C.; ANGELA comes down R.*)

LADY S. Presently. It's a little hot in the sun. (*shakes hands with LORD ROBERT, L.*) Don't mind me. I'll follow you.

LORD R. There's no hurry.

LADY S. No, no. Go on with your game, or I shall think I'm in the way. (LORD ROBERT joins VIOLET up L.C.)

DUKE. (*up C.*) If Wyckham is going to play we shall be an odd number.

LADY S. Yes, well — Miss Muir will stay and talk to me, I'm sure.

ANGELA. Oh yes. (*crosses L. to LADY SYLVIA and shakes hands*)

DUKE. (*coming down C.*) No, no. We can't spare Miss Muir.

LADY S. (*aside to ANGELA*) I must speak to you.

ANGELA. (*to the DUKE*) I'd rather you left me out this time, really.

The DUKE goes up C.

VIOLET. (*to DUKE*) You must put up with me as a partner.

DUKE. Good. We'll play the two men. We'll show them — walk away from them. Ha, ha! Poor Vyse! Ha, ha! (*exit with VIOLET C. to L., followed by LORD R.; LADY S. goes up C.*)

VYSE. (*goes up C. to LADY S.*) You're out early this morning, Lady Sylvia.

LADY S. One has to be up very early — sometimes.

VYSE hesitates as if about to speak, then, after a pause, exits slowly C. to L.

ANGELA. (*crossing to couch R.C.*) I have to thank you, Lady Sylvia, for such a delightful time last evening. I enjoyed myself immensely. (*puts mallet on couch R.C. and sits*)

LADY S. I saw you did, (*sits in arm-chair L.C.*) and that is why I am here this morning. I want to speak to you, and — quite plainly.

ANGELA. Oh, thank you!

LADY S. Miss Muir, you are very young.

ANGELA. Not so very young. I'm nearly nineteen.

LADY S. A mere child.

ANGELA. (*sweetly*) To you, perhaps. (*ANGELA speaks in the most sweetly innocent manner while LADY SYLVIA keeps her feelings well under restraint*)

LADY S. To anyone.

ANGELA. Of course I *do* feel young, because I look upon girls of two or three and twenty as old. And after thirty — well — women, in my eyes, seem to be quite ancient then, poor things.

LADY S. Yes. Well — I didn't come to discuss the question of age.

ANGELA. Oh, I thought when you began by saying I was a mere child —

LADY S. I meant not in years only. (*rises and goes to chair B.C. a little above couch*) Now, I wish you to feel that I am your friend—your true friend.

ANGELA. I do. And it makes me very happy.

LADY S. (*moves chair down a little to L. of couch*) It is the question of your happiness which concerns me at the present moment, and impels me to speak to you very seriously.

ANGELA. (*wonderingly*) Lady Sylvia! (*moves a little on couch to R.*)

LADY S. (*glances at windows, and sits on chair*) I want to put you on your guard, to warn you against Mr. Vyse.

ANGELA. Mr. Vyse? (*rises*)

LADY S. He is not at all a nice man for you to know.

ANGELA. Isn't he? (*sits on couch*)

LADY S. He's anything but a good man.

ANGELA. Not a good——!

LADY S. In fact, he is an extremely bad one.

ANGELA. Oh, but he's better now—much better. I know he wasn't formerly all he should have been; but now he looks back with hatred on his past.

LADY S. Absurd!

ANGELA. No, really. He's very sorry for himself, and he's going to begin a new life. I know he is, because he told me so himself.

LADY S. And this charming resolution of his is due to your influence? I suppose he told you that?

ANGELA. I think he did mention it.

LADY S. Of course.

ANGELA. He says all his old friends have become distasteful to him. They're so hollow and empty. I think he must have fallen among a very bad set of people. Don't you?

LADY S. You poor foolish child. And how long, may I ask, has he been making love to you?

ANGELA. Making love?

LADY S. I presume you know what making love means?

ANGELA. Oh yes. (*rises and crosses C.*) I've seen the people down at Dorking on Bank Holidays. They change hats, put their arms round each other's necks, and sing at the top of their voices; but Mr. Vyse has never even suggested we should do anything of that kind. (*sits in arm-chair L.C.*)

LADY S. (*rises*) Your simplicity is very refreshing, but let me tell you that he is behaving abominably (C.)

ANGELA. Why—how?

LADY S. Because—while amusing himself with you, he is in love with someone else.

ANGELA. How can you know?

LADY S. I do know, and I pity you with all my heart. (a. of ANGELA) I can't let this go on and see you made wretched and miserable if I can help it; so do—do take my advice and have nothing more to say to him. I shall feel I have done my duty and shall go home so relieved, if you will promise never to see him again.

ANGELA. Is this—someone else—a friend of yours?

LADY S. I—I know her. (goes R.)

ANGELA. But if she doesn't care for him——

LADY S. But she does. (R.C.)

ANGELA. Then why doesn't he marry her?

LADY S. Because—ah! now you will see what kind of man he is—because she is already married.

ANGELA. Oh, how dreadful! (rises)

LADY S. Yes.

ANGELA. How shocking!

LADY S. Yes.

ANGELA. What a wicked woman she must be!

LADY S. *She!* (down R.)

ANGELA. (L.C.) Yes. She must be much worse than he. Oh, I think she must be *infinitely* worse; don't you? *He* isn't married, and so he's not deceiving his wife; but *she*—oh, what a dreadful person! How awfully sorry you must feel for her unfortunate husband!

LADY S. (controlling herself with difficulty) At any rate, I hope you will show Mr. Vyse that you wish to have nothing more to do with him, and Violet must be asked not to invite him to the house.

ANGELA. But you invited him to yours.

LADY S. (taken aback) I—oh—yes—but—I am a married woman.

ANGELA. But, from what you've told me, that doesn't appear to make much difference to him.

LADY S. Well, I've warned you, and you must see that he's a man you ought not to know.

ANGELA. It's awfully sweet of you to be so anxious on my account.

LADY S. My only object was to endeavor to keep you and Mr. Vyse apart.

ANGELA. Thank you so very much. I'm sure you are quite like a mother to me.

LADY S. I have done my duty, that is all. (goes up C.)

ANGELA. And I—I, dear Lady Sylvia, will do *my* duty.

LADY S. That's right.

ANGELA. (sits in arm-chair L.C.) I see plainly—oh, so plainly, that it rests with me to save Mr. Vyse.

LADY S. Save him? (*comes down c.*)

ANGELA. (*rising and facing her*) From that horrid woman. (*going to couch B.C.*) I will do my best in my poor little way to make him forget her. (*sits*) I'll try and persuade him to come and play croquet here every day so that I can see him constantly. I'll use all the influence, which he says I possess, to work upon his better nature; and I believe—I quite hope and believe I shall end in effecting a complete cure.

LADY S. (*losing control*) You shall not. (*L. of ANGELA*) You shall do nothing of the kind.

ANGELA. (*rises*) But, Lady Syl—

LADY S. This simple innocence is very well done, but it doesn't hoodwink *me*. You influence him? You reform him? Rubbish! (*crosses R.*) You're in love with him. Yes, you are; you're in love with him and you think you'll catch him.

ANGELA. Really I—

LADY S. But you won't. He's far too clever for that. He might marry for money, but never for love. And as for love—you needn't flatter yourself he cares a snap of his finger for you; for he doesn't. (*laughing cynically*) Oh no; oh dear, no. Don't imagine that for an instant.

ANGELA. You seem to know him very well.

LADY S. I do.

ANGELA. Almost as well as—that dreadful creature. (*C.*)

LADY S. What do you mean? (*pause*) What do you mean?

ANGELA. Mean?

LADY S. What has he told you?

ANGELA. Why do you—

LADY S. What do you know?

ANGELA. You mean—?

LADY S. You know perfectly well what I mean.

ANGELA. Do I?

LADY S. But it's not true. It's absolutely false! And remember this—that not only people who *talk* scandal, but those who *repeat* it can be punished in a court of law.

ANGELA. But really, Lady Sylvia—

LADY S. (*going to D.R.*) I've nothing more to say. I've warned you; and you'll be sorry for yourself when your eyes are opened. You to help him to begin a new life! A new life! (*laughs cynically*) You child, you baby! How thoroughly he must enjoy the joke! (*with pretended gravity*) But never mind that. Don't relax, do your duty; and don't—don't let anyone deter you from persevering in your work of reformation. (*exit D.R. laughing sarcastically*)

ally; ANGELA goes to couch R.C., takes up her mallet, rests the head of it on the couch, and stands leaning with both hands on the handle looking after LADY SYLVIA with a quiet smile)

ANGELA. How beautifully she gave herself away.

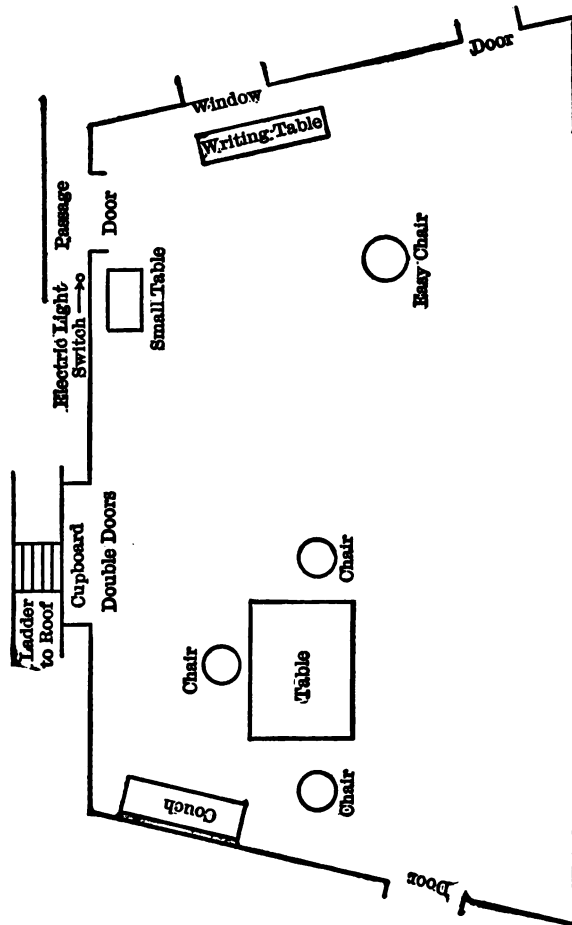
A peal of laughter is heard from the garden.

ACT DROP.

ACT III.

SMARTLY FURNISHED MAN'S ROOM.

The ladder in the cupboard is flat against the back wall.



ACT III.

TIME.—*The same afternoon.*

SCENE.—*VYSE's chambers in Bond-street. There is a fog outside, and the stage is only dimly lighted.*

Enter VIOLET AYNLEY, LORD ROBERT WYCKHAM, and MRS. CROPPER, D.L. at back.

LORD R. (c.) How long has Mr. Vyse been gone?

MRS. C. (l.c.) About a quarter of an hour, sir. But where 'e went, and 'ow long 'e'll be, and what time 'e'll be home again I don't know no more than the dead.

LORD R. (to VIOLET) We may as well wait.

VIOLET. (B.) I think so.

LORD R. (to MRS. CROPPER) Where is his man?

MRS. C. Mr. Carter, sir?

LORD R. Yes, Carter.

MRS. C. 'E's out, too, sir. 'E told me as 'ow Mr. Vyse said 'e didn't want 'im for nothin', and 'e could take the arfternoon to 'isself; so 'e's gone off to see 'is young woman what lives in Grosvenor-square—no, I'm tellin' you a story; it ain't Grosvenor-square, it's Grosvenor-place, 'cause 'e passed the remark that 'is young lady was upper 'ousemaid along o' Sir Solomon and Lady Jacobs, what started in life in the second 'and clothes line, just as you and me might 'ave done, sir, and only shows the luck 'as falls to some people; for what I will say is this, you may scrub and you may rub——

LORD R. (*trying to stop her*) Yes, yes.

MRS. C. You may scrub and you may rub——

LORD R. Yes, quite so.

MRS. C. You may scrub and you may——

LORD R. Look here. Are you a gramophone?

MRS. C. No, sir. I'm a widder. I lives in the basement, and cleans up the rooms and swills down the stairs; and when you comes to six flights——

LORD R. Do you think you could get us some tea?

MRS. C. Tea, sir?

VIOLET. Perhaps she doesn't know where the things are kept?

Mrs. C. Oh, yes, I does, mum. There ain't a lock-up in the place. Mr. Vyse leaves everything out. Quite the gentleman, 'e is.

LORD R. Yes, well we should like some tea.

Mrs. C. And I don't know nothin' more refreshin' than a nice cup o' tea. I always do say when your arms is achin' and your back feels a'most broke in 'alf, that a good strong cup with three lumps o' sugar and not too much milk is a necktie fit for the godsees. (*exit D.L. at back*)

VIOLET. That woman positively takes one's breath away. Good gracious! how thick this fog is getting.

LORD R. Yes. By Jove! it's almost quite dark. I say—it's just as well that Carter's absent. I told you Vyse wouldn't be here, didn't I? Now we'll have a ripping time, all to ourselves. (*about to embrace her*)

Enter Mrs. CROPPER D.L. at back.

Mrs. C. Oh, my goodness, the room is full of this blessed fog! 'Ere, I'll give you some light. (*switches on the electric light*) I beg pardon, but will you take anything with your tea? A boiled egg, or some bloater-paste, or —

VIOLET sits R. of table R.O.

LORD R. A little bread and butter, cake, anything —

Mrs. C. You'll excuse me asking you, but what I always say is, I don't 'old with tea on a empty stomach. (*exit D.L. at back*)

LORD R. (*sitting on back of table R.O. and close to VIOLET*) As I was saying — I knew we should be alone here — we've the whole afternoon before us, and, by Jove, it's almost too good to be true to feel I've got you all to myself.

VIOLET. You silly old boy.

LORD R. Ah, my dearest darling. My own, own — (*about to embrace her*)

Enter Mrs. CROPPER; LORD ROBERT and VIOLET rise.

Mrs. C. I beg pardon. You must excuse me, sir, and your good lady, too, but, as Mr. Vyse is out and Mr. Carter as well, and me bein' in charge of the premises, and responsible like, it 'ave just 'appen to strike me that p'raps you wouldn't mind bein' so good as to tell me who you are.

LORD R. (*confused*) Quite so — to be sure — I —

VIOLET. (*crossing L.*) I am Mr. Vyse's sister.

Mrs. C. (c.) Oh, indeed, mum.

LORD R. (R.) Yes, and I'm his brother.

Mrs. C. Oh, indeed, sir. Well, I do 'umbly 'ope you'll forgive me puttin' the question.

LORD R. Yes, yes, certainly. You're quite right.

Mrs. C. Of course I didn't think as there was exactly anything wrong, and I never thought you looked as if you wasn't respectable—'cause you do; but one can't be too careful; for mistakes is made sometimes, and there's a lot o' queer people about. (*exit D.L. at back*)

LORD R. (*laughing*) His sister! (*goes L. to VIOLET*) What the dickens made you say that?

VIOLET. What *could* I say?

LORD R. But how you jumped at it.

VIOLET. Because I thought you were going to give us away. It's all very well for you, my dear man, but if I'd given her my name, she'd have told Mr. Vyse I'd been here, and then—don't you see, you goose?

LORD R. Yes, yes. Sister was distinctly good. And I—(*laughing*) I capped it with brother, didn't I? Dear old Vyse. He'll wonder who on earth we were.

VIOLET. I hope to heavens he won't recognize me from her description.

LORD R. Not he; I'll undertake to put him off the scent. Now, now, my dear Violet, don't frighten yourself. There's no danger, not the least, I assure you. It's perfectly safe, far safer than down below in the tea-shop, where anyone might see us. Ah, my own dearest love, my—(*about to embrace her*)

VIOLET. (*retreating*) No, no. Not yet. Wait till she's brought in the tea. (*goes R.*) He's got rather nice rooms, hasn't he?

LORD R. Not bad. (*sits in chair L.C.; looking sulky*)

VIOLET. I like exploring, don't you? (*pushes open door R. and looks in*) I suppose this is—yes. A small dining-room. Very cosy though. Oh, I think you men know how to make yourselves comfy. (*pointing to door L.*) What's in there.

LORD R. (*rises*) Sort of box-room, I fancy. (*goes to D.L.*)

VIOLET. (*going up R.*) I'm bent on a tour of inspection. It's fun looking over a man's rooms; particularly when the man's away.

LORD R. (*looking in at D.L.*) Portmanteaus and hat-boxes; keeps his guns and fishing tackle here, too.

VIOLET. (*opening cupboard doors R. at back*) This is only a kind of landing with a ladder going up somewhere.

LORD R. (*going up to VIOLET*) Leads through a trap door to the roof, I expect. That's in case of fire, you know.

VIOLET. (*coming down L.*) What an awful thing to be caught by fire.

LORD R. (*up stage*) Or—a husband. That ladder might be useful in either event. (*shuts cupboard doors*)

VIOLET. I wish you wouldn't talk of husbands when we've come here to spend a pleasant afternoon. (*sits in chair L.C.*)

LORD R. (*comes down c.*) Well, there's no danger of yours turning up.

VIOLET. Not the slightest. What would you do if he did?

LORD R. (*pointing to cupboard*) Make straight for the roof.

VIOLET. You wretch! Do you know, I can't imagine why you're so very much opposed to marriage.

LORD R. (*takes chair from L. of table R.C. and brings it C. and leans over back of it*) Opposed? Not at all. I strongly advocate marriage—in other people. The truth is, my dear child, I'm excessively romantic. There's a deep vein of sentiment in my character, and the ordinary prosaic attachment to the conventional girl doesn't appeal to me in the least. I know, because I've tried it. I was once engaged for two days to a charming creature, a sylph, a fairy! The day after I proposed, I called on her mother. She was—well, not a fairy, and she was fatally pleased at her daughter's engagement. Then two brothers and three sisters appeared, all infernally pleased. Lastly the father came in, and he was damnably pleased. That settled it. The entire family with one accord sat on the flower of my romance and crushed it; and I left the house never to return.

VIOLET. Your love had a short life.

LORD R. (*places chair R. of VIOLET and sits*) Naturally. It was killed by the commonplace. For the existence of a really great passion that is worthy of the name, three persons are necessary—the husband, the wife, and the other one.

VIOLET. But how will it end?

LORD R. In the usual way—by the survival of the fittest. Love as a poetic dream is only possible when it's hemmed in by difficulties, attended with risks, and accompanied by the charm of uncertainty. Why are we here to-day?

VIOLET. We oughtn't to have come. (*rises and crosses R.*)

LORD R. (*rises*) Exactly. That's why we're here. (*puts chair back at L. of table R.C.*) What is the toast and water of matrimony compared with the champagne of the stolen interview? Ah! don't you realise, don't you appreciate the ineffable attraction of our equivocal position?

VIOLET. I—I'm a little bit afraid I do.

LORD R. Of course; it's a natural instinct. Ah, my beautiful sweetheart, my— (*about to embrace her, the door outside in the passage is heard to slam*)

VIOLET. Shush! Listen! (*looking at D.L. at back*)

LORD R. What?

VIOLET. I heard the door!

LORD R. The woman.

VIOLET. (*alarmed*) No, no. A voice. A man's voice (*going quickly R.*) I heard him distinctly!

LORD R. (*listening*) It can't be Vyse. (*runs to D.L. at back, opens it and peeps out*)

VIOLET. Good gracious, I hope not.

LORD R. (*shuts door softly, but quickly*) Look out! They're coming up! The dining-room—go into the dining-room.

VIOLET. (*half angrily*) And you told me we should be perfectly safe here.

LORD R. (*going quickly R.*) Never mind what I told you. Into the dining-room.

VIOLET *exits quickly D.R., followed by LORD ROBERT; enter ANGELA MUIR and VYSE D.L. at back.*

ANGELA. Oh, so this is the ladies' tea-room? (*comes down R.C. looking round room*)

VYSE. Yes, this is the ladies' tea-room. (*puts his hat and stick on table R. of D.L. at back*)

ANGELA. (*looking round room*) There's no one here at present.

VYSE. Isn't there? No; I suppose it's a little early.

ANGELA. I don't think it's quite such a pretty room as the one downstairs.

VYSE. No; but it's quieter.

ANGELA. Yes, it—it seems quieter. Will your friends know where to find us when they come?

VYSE. My—my friends? (*comes down L. of ANGELA*) Oh, I forgot—didn't I tell you? They've all disappointed me. I had three wires at the last moment to say they couldn't come.

ANGELA. (*c.*) Oh, how very annoying.

VYSE. Do you mind?

ANGELA. I was thinking of your disappointment.

VYSE. Oh, I don't care a snap. In fact I'm awfully glad, because it will be so much jollier all by ourselves.

ANGELA. You don't think I require a chaperone?

VYSE. Not at all.

ANGELA. I only asked because I know nothing about these things. You see I live in the country.

VYSE. And you bring the scent of the hay with you. I say, isn't this fog awful? I'm afraid it's going to be a regular pea-souper. (*goes up to window L.*)

ANGELA. And in the summer, too. (*sits L. of table R.C.*) Do you know I've never seen a real London fog.

VYSE. Ah; then I expect this one is on show for your especial benefit.

Enter MRS. CROPPER D.L. at back with tray containing tea-service. She comes slowly down L.C., staring at ANGELA, and crosses round R. and up to R. of table R.C. As she crosses, ANGELA rises and goes C. to VYSE, who meets her up C. VYSE stares at MRS. CROPPER.

ANGELA. (*aside to VYSE*) Who is that?

VYSE. Eh? oh? (*aside to ANGELA*) The waitress with the tea.

MRS. C. (*putting tray on table*) I saw you come in, sir, so I 'urried up, and you're just in time.

VYSE. Ah, yes — thank you.

MRS. C. I didn't know whether you was comin' back or not, sir; and so I told yer brother and sister.

VYSE. What?

ANGELA. (*aside to VYSE*) Were you expecting your brother and —

VYSE. (*aside to ANGELA*) What, no — she thinks I'm someone else. (*goes L. with ANGELA, and they stand with their backs to MRS. CROPPER*)

MRS. C. (*arranging tray*) I've made yer a nice cup o' tea. A spoonful for each and one for the pot. (*goes to D.R. and calls as if to LORD ROBERT and VIOLET*) Tea is quite ready, sir, when you are. (*turns away from D.R.*)

VYSE. (*turning*) Yes, all right. Thanks.

MRS. C. (*at table R.C.*) I think you'll find I've cut the bread and butter as thin as a wafer, and I got the cake and the biscuits down in the shop. (*goes C., ANGELA crosses R.*)

VYSE. Yes, yes.

MRS. C. (*pulling down her sleeves*) I do 'ope, sir, as you'll excuse the state I'm in, but this is my washin' and scrubbin' day, and, as the lady will tell yer, yer can't clean the 'ouse and yerself at the same time. (*exit D.L. at back*)

VYSE. No. Quite so.

Re-enter MRS. CROPPER quickly.

MRS. C. Oh, well, there, I *am* forgetful. You'll want two more cups, won't you? I'll not keep yer a minute. (*exit D.L. at back*)

ANGELA. What a funny woman, isn't she?

VYSE. Yes, a sort of charwoman, I fancy. I suppose they're short of waitresses to-day, and so they're making use of her.

ANGELA. How in the world shall I get home if the fog lasts?

VYSE. You'll have to stay here till it clears.

ANGELA. But you'll be getting so tired of me.

VYSE. So tired that I wish the fog would last for a week.

ANGELA. (*smiling*) Oh!

VYSE. A month——

ANGELA. Oh!

VYSE. A year.

ANGELA. Oh! (*laughs and goes R.*)

VYSE. (*going R.*) Now let me give you some tea.

ANGELA. No, no; I'll preside over the tea. That's my province. (*puts her sunshade on couch R. and sits at back of table R.C. facing audience; VYSE stands L. of her*)

VYSE. By Jove! I wish you could pour out tea for me every day.

ANGELA. (*pouring out tea*) That's precisely what our Vicar said, only last week.

VYSE. It's like his impertinence.

ANGELA. Oh, no, he meant it.

VYSE. Has he a wife?

ANGELA. No, poor man, he can't afford one. He told me so, and I felt very sorry for him. He spoke so pathetically, and there were tears in his eyes when he wanted to kiss me. (*VYSE sits L. of table*)

VYSE. And—did he kiss you?

ANGELA. Yes. (*VYSE rises*) But only as a clergyman. Do you take cream?

VYSE. Please. (*goes close to her*)

ANGELA. And sugar?

VYSE. Please.

ANGELA. (*holding up sugar bowl*) Perhaps you'd better help yourself.

VYSE. (*gazing at her*) I should like to help myself. And I feel I can't help myself, for I *must* help myself and—— (*about to kiss her; the electric bell rings and he draws back*) Now who the dickens——

ANGELA. (*quietly*) What is it?

VYSE. (*a little up L.*) The bell. That idiot of a woman will say I'm at home. (*runs to door L., at back*)

ANGELA. Perhaps the room downstairs is quite full.

VYSE. (*opening door, putting his head out and beckoning to MRS. CROPPER*) Here, Hi! Pst; Pst. Confound her; she's gone to the door! (*pauses*) By George! (*shuts door quickly*) It's Sylvia!

ANGELA. Who?

VYSE. Lady Sylvia Bowlby! (*switches off the electric light; the stage is nearly dark*)

ANGELA. (*rises*) What did you do that for? (*goes down R.*)

VISE. You mustn't be seen.

ANGELA. Mustn't I?

VISE. No, no. She'll — she'll tell your cousin Violet, and you don't want her to know you've been here, do you — do you?

ANGELA. No, I don't. (*goes to D.R.*)

VISE. (*going quickly to cupboard doors R. at back*) No, no! Not in there. Here! go in here, it's a sort of cupboard. You'll be quite safe. (*opens cupboard doors*)

ANGELA. Why should I go in a cupboard? There are mice in that cupboard.

VISE. There's not a mice — I mean mouse. (*ANGELA takes cup of tea and piece of cake from table*) Quick — quick!

ANGELA. (*going up to cupboard*) You bring me out to tea, and you shut me in a cupboard! (*ANGELA goes into cupboard*)

VISE. She won't stay long. I'll get rid of her as soon as possible. (*shuts cupboard doors*)

ANGELA. (*inside cupboard*) I want to go back to the country! (*VISE runs to couch R., lies back on it with his feet up, and feigns sleep*)

Enter LADY SYLVIA BOWLBY and MRS. CROPPER D.L. at back; MRS. CROPPER carries a salver with two cups and saucers; LADY SYLVIA comes down L.C.

MRS. C. Walk in, mum, please. Why, dear me, we're all in the dark. What a fog it is to be sure. Well, reely, I never did. (*switches light on and goes to table R.C. with cups*)

VISE. Eh? Who's that? (*turns his head*) What? Oh! (*rising, affecting surprise*) I beg your pardon. (*MRS. CROPPER glances about, wondering what has become of the others*)

LADY S. (*shaking her head warningly*) How do you do, Mr. Vyse?

VISE. Ah; delighted to see you. (*crosses to LADY SYLVIA*) I — I'm afraid I was asleep. (*shakes hands*)

MRS. C. (*counting cups at table; aside*) One, two, three, four; (*glancing at LADY SYLVIA*) and now five. (*aloud, going to D.L. at back*) You'll want another cup, sir?

VISE. (*impatiently*) All right, all right.

MRS. C. I 'ope the lady will excuse the state o' my workin' clothes. You see, mum, I didn't know as Mr. Vyse was expectin' company, or you wouldn't 'ave found me undressed. (*exit D.L. at back*)

LADY S. (*very coldly*) I said last night I would send you a note to-day, but on second thoughts I decided to come myself. You didn't get my telegram?

VISE. Telegram — telegram? (*goes to writing table L.*)

LADY S. I knew you did not, because I see you didn't expect me. (R.C.)

VYSE. (*taking up telegram from writing table and tearing it open*) By Jove! Here it is. It must have come when I was out, and that woman never told me. (*glancing over message*) Yes, this is it.

LADY S. And you never saw it, although it was there before your eyes.

VYSE. I can't think how —

LADY S. No? I can. You were too much occupied. (*looking at tea-table*).

VYSE. Occupied?

LADY S. (*pointing to tea-things*) You were not alone. (*stands behind table*)

VYSE. Oh — oh, yes, yes. Some men dropped in. (c.)

LADY S. Indeed. (*sees ANGELA'S sunshade on couch. Goes R. and picks it up*) And one of them left his sunshade behind.

VYSE. One of — one of their wives, you mean.

LADY S. How very forgetful.

VYSE. I wonder which it was.

LADY S. (*looking at initials on silver band round the handle*) Here are her initials. A.M.

VYSE. Ah, Maxwell. Lady Maxwell.

LADY S. What does A. stand for?

VYSE. A? Oh, Anne or Amelia. I think it's Anna.

LADY S. (*looking fixedly at him*) Or — Angela.

VYSE. Is it? Perhaps so. I don't know.

LADY S. Lady Maxwell's name is *Edith*.

VYSE. Ah, then it can't be hers.

LADY S. No. (*throws sunshade on couch. Vehemently*) 'Ah! tch! (*comes down R. of table*) Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I didn't see how you were taken up with that Angela Muir all last evening, with hardly a word or look for anyone else? She with her eyes and her blushes and her pretty shy ways; so charming, so artless — losing her fan; losing her fiddlestick! So fresh, so natural, so sweetly simple. (*goes c.*) The dear little innocent baby was playing with you, twisting you round her finger, while you — you who call yourself a man of the world, were as completely tricked and cajoled as the veriest schoolboy.

VYSE. Really, you know, this is all pure imagination on your part.

LADY S. Perhaps it is pure imagination that you were playing croquet with her this morning. (*scornfully*) Croquet! (*goes up c.*)

VYSE. (*following her*) I assure you you haven't the slightest reason to be —

LADY S. I'm not blind.

VYSE. (*raising his voice*) You haven't the slightest reason to be —

LADY S. Nor am I deaf.

VYSE. (*lowering his voice*) The slightest reason to be jealous.

LADY S. Jealous! How dare you say I'm jealous? I — I jealous of a little country chit like that! (*crosses L.*)

VYSE. No, of course not. (*R.C.*)

LADY S. I'm only sorry for *you*. Sorry to find you're so easily taken in.

VYSE. Yes, well, never mind her now.

LADY S. (*forcing a smile*) I don't mind. (*sits in arm-chair L.C.*)

VYSE. That's right.

LADY S. (*with assumed sweetness, after a pause*) You won't see her again?

VYSE. No.

LADY S. No?

VYSE. No. (*LADY SYLVIA laughs softly*) Why do you laugh?

LADY S. I was wondering — (*laughs*)

VYSE. Yes?

LADY S. I was wondering how you intend to avoid seeing her.

VYSE. That's easy enough.

LADY S. Is it?

VYSE. Of course.

LADY S. I see one difficulty.

VYSE. What's that?

LADY S. (*sternly*) She's here now. (*raises*)

VYSE. I'll take my oath —

LADY S. Will you? In that case you will have no objection to my proving the truth of your assertion. (*crosses R.*)

VYSE. Oh, well, you must do as you please.

LADY S. Thank you very much. (*exit D.R., VYSE runs up to cupboard and opens doors a few inches*)

VYSE. (*to ANGELA*) If anyone tries this door, go up the ladder. There's a trap at the top.

ANGELA. (*in cupboard*) Yes, but — I want some more cake.

VYSE. Shush! (*shuts doors quickly and comes down L.C.*)

LADY S. (*in room R.*) While you are standing there behind the window curtain I'm afraid the tea will be getting cold.

VYSE. (*astounded*) Great Scott! What on earth —

Enter LADY SYLVIA D.R.

LADY S. Really it was very impolite of you to leave Miss Muir alone so long.

VYSE. Miss Muir?

LADY S. And all in the dark, too. Hadn't you better go and make your apologies? (*crosses L. VYSE goes towards D.E.*)

Enter VIOLET and LORD ROBERT D.E.; LADY SYLVIA and VYSE stare aghast at them.

VYSE. Well, I'm hanged! (*bursts into a fit of laughter*)

VIOLET. (*to LADY SYLVIA*) Good gracious, dear, we had no idea it was you. (R.C.)

LORD R. No! we thought Vyse was bringing in a — friend — a visitor whom Mrs. Aynsley didn't know; and so we — we thought he'd like us to wait in the dining-room for a bit. (*crosses L. to LADY SYLVIA*)

LADY S. (*smiling sweetly*) Oh, I quite understand.

VYSE. (*going to VIOLET*) I hadn't a notion there was anyone here. I'm awfully pleased to see you.

LORD R. (*aside to LADY SYLVIA*) You won't mention having met Mrs. Aynsley here.

LADY S. Oh, no.

LORD R. No, I thought not.

VYSE. (*aside to VIOLET*) That sunshade there. Say it's yours, will you?

VIOLET. Mine?

VYSE. Yes — no — wait. Say it's Miss Muir's.

VIOLET. Why?

VYSE. You brought it by mistake.

VIOLET. What do you —

VYSE. Please. Ask him for it. (*goes to back of chair L.C.*)

VIOLET. Oh; very well. (*to LORD ROBERT*) Bob!

LORD R. Yes. (*goes to VIOLET R.C.*)

VIOLET. I wish you'd find my sunshade.

LORD R. (*going R.*) Sunshade — sunshade? Where did you leave it? Oh, here it is. (*takes up sunshade from couch R.*)

VIOLET. Ah, thanks.

LADY S. Is that yours? (*going C.*)

VIOLET. (*taking sunshade from LORD ROBERT*) Yes. At least — no. (*looking at it*) Why, where did I get it? Oh, it's Angela's. I've brought away Angela's by mistake. How stupid! (*comes down R.; VYSE smiles and nods to LADY SYLVIA, as much as to say, "There, you see."*)

LADY S. Where is Miss Muir to-day?

VIOLET. She said she was going to meet some friends at Westminster Abbey. She's so fond of going about to such queer places. May I help myself to some tea? (*sits R. of table. LORD ROBERT sits at back of table, facing audience*)

VYSE. (*behind chair L.C.*) Oh, do! (*aside to LADY SYLVIA,*

who has come *E* of him) Don't you think you've been a little hard on me?

LADY S. (*humbly*) You must admit I had reason for suspicion.

VYSE. (*earnestly*) It hurt me horribly.

LADY S. (*penitently*) Archie, I'm sorry. You must forget it.

VYSE. I'll try to. (*turns up stage with LADY SYLVIA*)

LORD R. (*aside to VIOLET*) Your husband will never hear anything through *her*. She'd be giving herself away.

VIOLET. What a comfort, isn't it? (*gives him a cup of tea*)

LORD R. Yes. For the future we four constitute a mutual protection society. Do you know—I almost wish you were not married.

VIOLET. Do you? Come and see me to-morrow, and I'll tell you something.

VYSE. I hope the tea isn't cold? (*goes to table R.C.*)

VIOLET. No; but it's frightfully strong. (*gives cup to VYSE who gives it to LADY SYLVIA*)

VYSE. (*to LADY S.*) Are you afraid of your nerves?

LADY S. Thank goodness, I don't know what nerves are. (*sits L.C.*)

VIOLET. Nor I.

LORD R. Nerves were made for slaves.

VYSE. (*sitting on chair L. of table R.C., and taking cup of tea from VIOLET*) And make slaves of the people who own them. So many persons are in a constant state of apprehension and fidget; whereas, the plain, simple rule of life is — (*the electric bell rings, there is a pause, puts cup on table*) Half a minute. (*rises, goes to D.L. at back, opens it and stand listening*)

LADY S. If you are in a hurry to get home, Violet, you can take my carriage and send it back for me.

LORD R. Oh, thanks awfully.

VIOLET. (*to LORD R.*) She was speaking to *me*.

LORD R. The same thing.

VYSE. (*shutting door quickly*) Bowlby!!!

LADY S. (*rises*) My husband! (*goes L. quickly*)

VYSE. Yes, that's right. (*pointing to D.L.*) In there (*to VIOLET, who is going E.*) No, no. This way. Go with her. (*VIOLET runs across to L.*) I'll turn the light off presently, and when you hear me cough, slip out and steal away quietly.

Exeunt LADY SYLVIA and VIOLET D.L.

LORD R. (*C.*) Shall I stop?

VYSE. No; you'll be putting your foot in it.

LORD R. All right. (*runs to D.R.*) Half a minute. (*turns*

back to table, takes up cup and piece of cake and exits quickly D.R.)

VYSE. (*running to D.R.*) Here, I say, Bob! if he should see you—not a word about the ladies. Do you hear, Bob? (*exit D.R.*)

Enter MRS. CROPPER D.L. at back followed by BOWLBY and the DUKE OF ST. KITTS.

MRS. C. Yes, sir. Please to walk in, sir. Oh—why, surely they ain't all gone?

BOWLBY. All gone?

DUKE. Who?

MRS. C. Mr. Vyse 'ad company to tea, sir. His brother and sister and two other ladies. They must 'ave left without my seeing of 'em. But p'raps Mr. Vyse is 'ere still. (*goes to D.R.*)

DUKE. (*to BOWLBY*) Didn't know Vyse had a brother.

BOWLBY. She said his sister, too.

DUKE. Ah, that's very probable. Bachelors in chambers generally have sisters. (*turns up stage looking round room; goes slowly R. at back, and comes down R.*)

MRS. C. (*at D.R. to VYSE*) Very good, sir. (*turning to BOWLBY*) Mr. Vyse will be with you directly, sir. (*at table R.C.*) I'm sure the tea must be quite cold. (*feeling teapot*) Yes, that it is. I must make some fresh. (*exit with teapot D.L. at back*)

BOWLBY stands at writing table L., looking over illustrated papers, and facing L.; the DUKE is down R.; ANGELA opens cupboard doors softly and peeps out; at this moment the DUKE turns and they see each other; she leaves the doors wide open and goes up the ladder; the DUKE goes quickly up to cupboard, stands for a moment looking up after her, and then goes up the ladder; BOWLBY sees nothing of all this. Enter MRS. CROPPER D.L. at back, with teapot which she puts on table R.C.; she sees the cupboard doors open, and shuts them, leaving the R. one a little open, and then exits D.L. at back. Enter VYSE D.R.; seeing the cupboard door a little open he goes softly up R., closes door gently, comes down to D.R., jumps and comes down heavily on his feet (so as to make BOWLBY believe he has just entered), and goes C. with outstretched hand, as BOWLBY turns.

VYSE. (*affecting surprise*) Ah, Bowlby. I wondered who it was. (*BOWLBY is very cold and distant in manner, and does not take VYSE's hand*).

VISE. (*ignoring BOWLBY's manner*) The fog is very thick, isn't it?

BOWLBY. Yes. The Duke was taking refuge in the tea-shop below, and that's how we met.

VISE. St. Kitts?

BOWLBY. What? (*turning*) Why — where has he got to?

VISE. Was he here?

BOWLBY. Yes. He must have gone downstairs again.

VISE. There are some rather good-looking girls in the shop.

BOWLBY. (*sternly*) So much the better.

VISE. Eh?

BOWLBY. I mean he insisted on coming up. I couldn't get rid of him, and — I came here purposely to see you alone.

VISE. You'll excuse me I know. (*looking at his watch*) I've got a most important engagement, but if — five minutes —?

BOWLBY. I won't keep you three. Mr. Vyse, I must ask you to be good enough to discontinue your visits to my house.

VISE. What?

BOWLBY. You will not, I hope, give rise to any unnecessary scandal by compelling me to order my servants not to admit you.

VISE. Who has been jabbering?

BOWLBY. Jabbering?

VISE. Come! What silly woman has been filling your head with this nonsense?

BOWLBY. No one has said a word.

VISE. Then how —

BOWLBY. I have seen for myself — for some time. I am not blind.

VISE. You're entirely mistaken. There is not the slightest —

BOWLBY. Pardon me. I decline to discuss the matter. You will plainly understand that our acquaintance ceases from to-day. (*going*)

VISE. (*quickly*) Wait a bit.

BOWLBY. (*stopping*) Nothing that you may say can —

VISE. You'd better listen. It's for Lady — we won't mention names — it's for *her* sake. To show you how preposterously absurd your suspicions are, I may tell you that I'm going to be married.

BOWLBY. (*surprised*) Married? You! (L.O.)

VISE. Surprising, isn't it? (R.O.)

BOWLBY. Is this — true?

VISE. Perfectly.

BOWLBY. Do I know —

VISE. The lady? Oh, yes. She's Miss Muir,

BOWLBY. (*raising his voice in surprise*) Miss Muir?

YISE. (*quickly*) Don't shout — the people below will hear you.

BOWLBY. I'm astounded!

YISE. Why? She's a very charming girl.

BOWLBY. Yes, and that's the reason I — dear me!
(*crosses R.*)

YISE. Well — are you sorry you spoke?

BOWLBY. Of course if — if — I had known —

YISE. Never mind. We'll forget it. One should always excuse a husband. I've invariably done so.

BOWLBY. Anyway, I recall my words; and I —

YISE. That's all right. (*looks at his watch; goes up to table R. of D.L. at back, and takes up his hat and stick*)

BOWLBY. I see you're in a hurry, so I mustn't keep you.

YISE. Well, I'm afraid I must be off. I've got an appointment at the club.

BOWLBY. I don't know how you'll get there. If you don't mind I'll stop here and smoke a cigarette till it gets lighter. (*takes out cigarette case while standing down R.C., facing audience*)

YISE. (*drawing on his gloves*) Oh do, by all means. I'm sorry my man is out, but that woman will get you anything you want.

BOWLBY. Thanks. I think she's bringing some tea. (*YISE switches light off; the stage is quite dark*) I prefer tea to —
Hullo!

YISE. Confound that light. That's the second time to-day.

BOWLBY. Something wrong with the connection?

YISE. (*up C.*) Yes. I shall have to get a man to come and see to it. (*coughs*) Stay where you are while I find a candle. (*coughs*)

LADY SYLVIA and VIOLET *steal in softly from D.L. and*
LORD ROBERT *from D.R.*

BOWLBY. If you want a match I've got one.

YISE. No, no; don't strike it yet. Wait a bit. I know there's a candle here somewhere, and I'll lay my hand on it in a second. (*coughs three times*)

Enter MRS. CROPPER D.L. at back with hot water jug.

MRS. C. Why, my goodness me, whatever's happened to the light!

YISE. (*quickly*) Don't touch it!

MRS. CROPPER switches light on, puts jug on table by door, and exits D.L. at back. LADY SYLVIA, VIOLET and LORD ROBERT are discovered; the ladies are half way up stage L., and LORD ROBERT up stage R., above table, VYSE is up C., and BOWLBY down R. Tableau.

BOWLBY. Sylvia! And — and — (crosses C.)

VYSE. (*feigning great surprise*) Why — where in the world did you all spring from? (*laughs loudly; aside to LORD ROBERT*) Laugh — damn it — laugh! (*signals to the ladies to laugh; they all laugh heartily with the exception of BOWLBY*)

LADY S. (*laughing*) We did startle you, Mr. Vyse. Now didn't we?

VIOLET. (*laughing*) And Mr. Bowlby, too. (*goes to VYSE*)

LORD R. (*laughing*) By Jove, yes, we made 'em both jump! (*comes down R.*)

BOWLBY. I don't think I see the joke. (*crosses L.*)

LADY S. My dear John, do you ever see a joke?

VIOLET. Sylvia and I, you know — we — we were having tea downstairs, and — and —

LADY S. And Lord Robert came in.

LORD R. Yes — I came in.

LADY S. (*to VYSE*) And he said that you lived up here.

LORD R. Yes, that's what I said. Vyse lives up here, I said. Just like that. Vyse lives up here. I knew you were in —

VIOLET. Out, you mean. (*crosses to LORD ROBERT*)

LORD R. Out, I mean. I knew you were out, and —

VIOLET. And he said what a lark it would be to make your servant give us tea, and then you'd wonder who on earth had been in your rooms. (*laughs*)

VYSE. (*laughing*) What a chap you are, Bob!

LADY S. Yes, and in the middle of the festivities we heard you coming in, and Lord Robert jumped up —

LORD R. I did, by Jove, I jumped up.

LADY S. And said let us all hide.

LORD R. Yes, let's all hide, I said. Just like that. Let's all hide.

VIOLET. So we scampered in there, and he skipped in there, and — oh dear, I shall never forget your face when we caught you! (*they all laugh loudly except BOWLBY*)

BOWLBY. Are you coming home now, Sylvia?

LADY S. In this frightful fog? No, thank you; it's a little too risky.

BOWLBY. You are not usually deterred by anything — risky.

VIOLET. (*laughing*) Well, we've all come down like an avalanche on poor Mr. Vyse. Haven't we? (*crosses R.*)

BOWLBY. (*crossing C.R.*) And now we are here, we must all offer him our hearty congratulations.

LADY S. Congratulations? (*down L.*)

BOWLBY. On a happy event. (*watching the effect on LADY SYLVIA*) Our friend, Mr. Vyse, has just told me that he and Miss Muir are engaged to be married.

VIOLET. (*astounded*) Angela—engaged?

LADY S. (*under her breath*) Oh! (*goes up L.*)

LORD R. Why, Vyse, old chap, I had no idea—

VYSE. (*confused*) Yes, well—Mr. Bowlby's a little premature, perhaps—but—yes. (*BOWLBY crosses L.*)

LORD R. (*aside to VIOLET*) I say, by Jove, this is rather a crusher for Lady Sylvia.

VIOLET. (*aside to LORD R.*) I hope to goodness she won't give herself away.

LADY S. (*going to VYSE*) Mr. Vyse, I congratulate you most heartily. (*shaking hands*) Miss Muir is a sweet girl, and you have my best—my very best wishes for your happiness.

VYSE. (*a little awkwardly*) Thanks. Thanks very much. (*they look each other steadily in the eyes for a moment and LADY SYLVIA turns up stage*)

VIOLET. (*aside to LORD R.*) Bravo, Sylvia!

LORD R. (*aside to VIOLET*) By gad, she's splendid!

VYSE. Well, now, you must all stay and have tea. *Finish* tea I should say, since we disturbed you in the middle of it. Lady Sylvia (*going to table R.C.*) let me give you another cup of— (*thumping sound heard above cupboard*)

LORD R. What's that noise?

VYSE. That? Oh, it's—I don't know. Something next door. (*the thumping continues*)

BOWLBY. How thin the walls are in these places.

VYSE. (*behind table, facing audience*) Yes. Great nuisance sometimes. (*pours out tea; coughing and sneezing heard*)

LORD R. It's someone in that room.

VYSE. It's not a room. It's a way to the roof. (*coughing and sneezing continues*)

VIOLET. Hush. Listen!

LORD R. I tell you it's someone in there. (*goes to cupboard doors*)

VYSE. Oh, I remember now. It's the workmen.

LORD ROBERT pulls open cupboard doors before VYSE can stop him. Enter the DUKE and ANGELA from cupboard; their clothes are covered with dirt and their faces streaked with black.

VIOLET. The Duke!

LADY S. Miss Muir!

DUKE. (*coughing and wiping his face with his handkerchief*) We've had such a time! We—we went up on the roof——

ANGELA. (*gasping*) Among the chimneys.

DUKE. And that infernal trap door slammed down.

ANGELA. And we pulled and tugged for at least ten minutes.

DUKE. Ten weeks!

ANGELA. And what with the smoke——

DUKE. And the fog——

ANGELA. We couldn't see the view. The Duke was so kind; he wanted me to see the view. He says it's quite lovely up there on a fine day.

LADY S. (*coldly*) What a very unexpected meeting, isn't it? (*to VIOLET*) I thought you said Miss Muir was at Westminster Abbey. (*L.*)

ANGELA. (*c.*) Oh yes, you see I was lost in the fog.

LADY S. (*sarcastically*) And wandered here over the roofs?

DUKE. (*R. of ANGELA*) How did *you* come here, Sylvia? By the tube?

VIOLET. (*aside to VYSE*) Was Angela here all the time?

VYSE. Yes.

VIOLET. Angela, dear, this is a surprise. We have just heard the wonderful news of your engagement to Mr. Vyse.

ANGELA. My engagement to Mr. Vyse!

DUKE. Vyse? Nothing of the sort. *I* am the happy man.

OTHERS. You! !

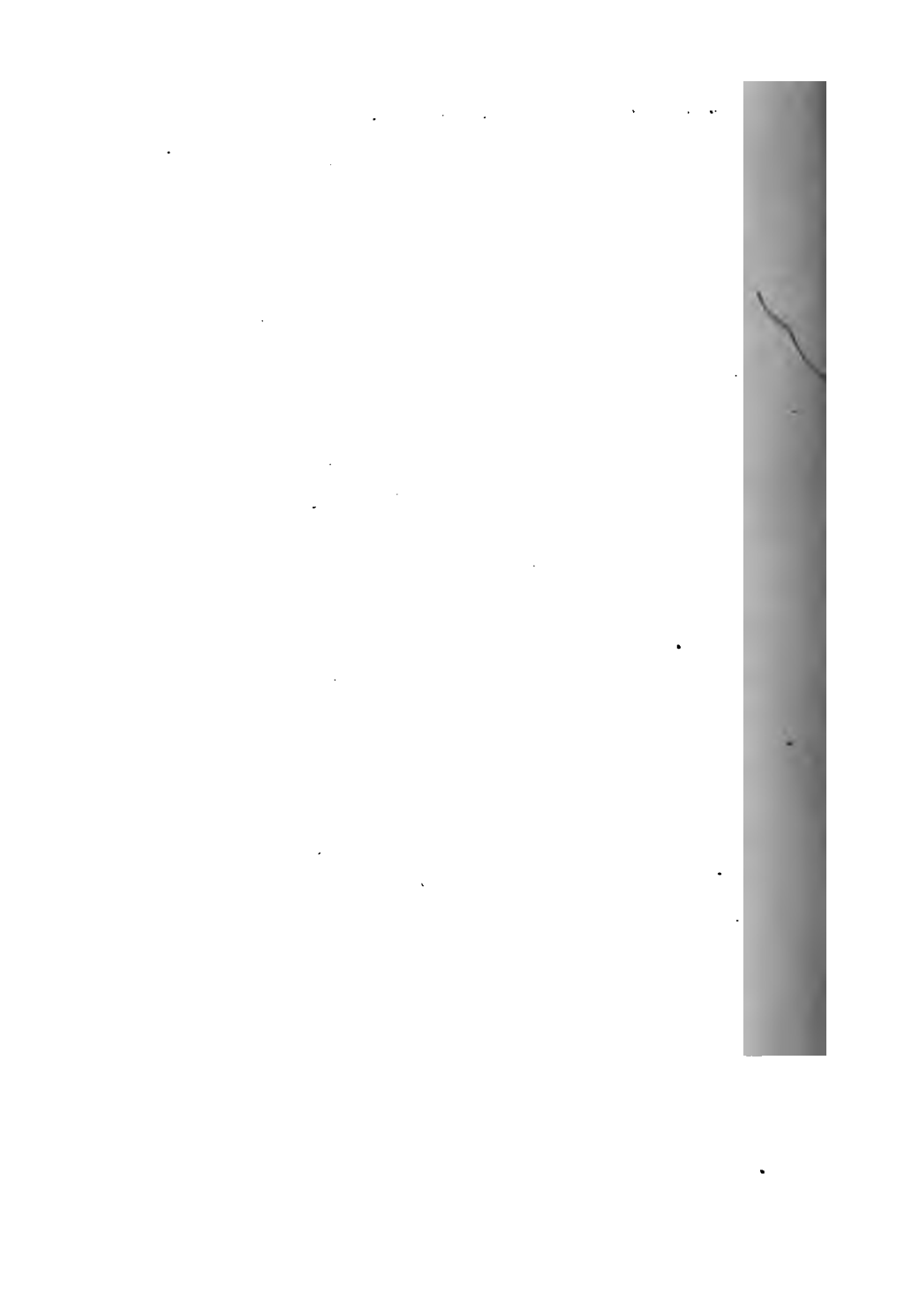
ANGELA. Yes. The Duke is so good. He has very kindly asked me to be a duchess.

BOWLBY. (*L.*) But—there must be some mistake!

DUKE. Mistake? (*to ANGELA*) We mean it; don't we?

ANGELA. Oh, yes, Alaric. (*to the others*) I'm only a simple girl, with a great deal to learn; but I hope I shall make a successful duchess, although, as you know, I've always lived in the country.

CURTAIN.







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